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The Roles of School Advisory Councils in School Improvement: A Case Study in Policy Interpretation

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THE ROLES OF SCHOOL ADVISORY COUNCILS IN SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT: A CASE STUDY IN POLICY INTERPRETATION

by

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The Roles of School Advisory Councils in School Improvement:
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The Florida Legislature responded to the national call for education reform by passing four statutes in 1991, referred to as Blueprint 2000. One intent of the legislation was to encourage change in schools through local community involvement in School Advisory Councils (SAC). The SAC, composed of parents, community members, teachers, and students was responsible for guiding the school through the process of school improvement.

The purpose of the study was to investigate the role of the SAC in the implementation of Florida school improvement initiatives. The study was designed to identify local factors affecting the interpretation of policy and to develop understanding of the members of the SACs defined their roles.

Four elementary schools in Duval County, Florida, were selected for study. A case study approach over one year was used to gather data from written

materials, participant observation, and interviews. The data were analyzed to develop understanding of the roles of the SAC from the participants' perspectives.

Findings indicated that SACs were fulfilling their basic responsibilities as outlined in the legislation. Evidence showed that no decision was entirely site based and the extent of the SAC's influence was greater than intended. Members' perceptions of influence to implement change may be more potent than the actual authority given to the SAC by law.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

"If it isn't broken, don't fix it" is a maxim frequently heard in society. To those who oppose change this may be their rallying cry. However, during the early 1990s the widespread belief among the public and educators was that the educational system was broken and in dire need of fixing. "The inevitable conclusion from the evidence at hand is that the old system is no longer adequate to the task" (Betts, 1992, p. 41). The task at hand was how to fix the system.

The movement toward reform in education has a long and detailed history. The impetus for change has become part of the national agenda as well as a local concern. Starting with A Nation at Risk in 1983 and culminating with the perspective defined by the national educational goals referred to as "America 2000" and The SCANS Report (Secretary's Commission on Achieving Necessary Skills), which was released by the U. S. Department of Labor in 1991, the movement to improve schools became a national priority. Almost every professional publication and local newspaper in the 1980s contained articles describing the ills and problems in education. Agreement that improvement was

needed seemed apparent despite the lack of agreement about the nature of the problem or the appropriate methods to fix it.

One recommendation for improvement was for more community and parental involvement in making decisions at the local school level. The growth of school shared decision making teams, local school councils, and, in Florida, school advisory councils were examples of this trend. Research was inconclusive regarding whether parental participation in school governance resulted in improved education for students.

One thing was certain, for change to occur policy had to be operationalized at the school level. Change could not take place in our schools without simultaneously altering policies on several levels: federal, state, school district, and individual school. As new policies were developed it would be incumbent on the schools to put them in place. Frequently, implementation, defined as the interval between the decision and operation, has been a challenge to educators. Transformation of our schools required not only new policy initiatives, but careful implementation of these initiatives.

Statement of Purpose

The purpose of the study was to investigate the roles of the school advisory council (SAC) in the implementation of Florida school improvement initiatives. At the time of this study, Florida, specifically the schools in Duval County, were struggling to implement legislation mandating local accountability in school

improvement. The entire concept of school improvement in Florida was predicated on implementing change for the better in our schools through parental and community involvement in the SAC at the individual school level.

By law the SACs were given the responsibility for the restructuring of the schools through involvement in a myriad of school activities. Although district School Boards were to maintain their authority in a school district, by law, each SAC determined its own membership, identified issues of concern, and then developed plans and strategies to alleviate the problems. The focus of all activities was to enable the school to meet the Florida education goals.

During the spring of 1992, the public schools in Duval County formed their school advisory councils and submitted the names of members to the School Board for approval. Principals, teachers, administrators, and community members received training on the expectations and requirements of school improvement policy. Participants received instruction in many areas deemed important to effective councils. Collaborative problem solving, group dynamics, and methods for identifying school needs and developing school improvement plans were a few of the skills presented to the participants.

At this point the SACs began to grow and develop on their own. Despite this uniformity in training, SACs developed at different rates. Variability in size, length of existence, composition of members, and willingness to take action in SACs were noted during this study. Each school and its SAC responded in a

distinct manner and carved out for itself a unique path to school improvement in their educational community.

At the time of this study, SACs had been in operation for approximately one year and were in a critical phase of development. The legislature had not clearly delineated the authority of the SAC and the members of the SACs were constructing their own understanding of their roles and the function of the SAC.

Several issues warranted investigation. How was the SAC responding to the legislation? What areas of school improvement were the SACs accepting? How did the members of the SAC define their roles? It was this variability of self-determination among the SACs that was intriguing and important to education in Florida. How the SACs developed and interpreted their role in implementing change at this time would affect the future of school reform initiatives in Florida.

Significance of the Research

One assumption controlling the study was that the local context would impact the implementation of the policy (Darling-Hammond, 1990). Murphy (1991) stressed the importance of individuals in schools redefining their roles and responsibilities as a key ingredient of school restructuring. From state mandates and guidelines to local school implementation, the SAC would serve as an interpreter, mediator, and implementer of policy. Individual SAC members would develop personal understandings and collective beliefs about the role of the SAC in school improvement. Those definitions would vary in different local

circumstances. SAC members needed to discover their responsibilities in the process of change.

Interpreter, mediator, implementer, the SACs could play an active role in the school improvement movement in Florida. The interpretation of policy was at the individual school level and the actions and definitions the SAC developed would be significant. The role of the SAC as either leaders, stumbling blocks or bystanders of meaningful change in schools was pivotal to education in Florida. Studying one county's experiences with community participation in educational reform through the SAC provided insight into guiding change in the future.

Proponents of parental involvement believe SACs have the potential to play an important role in the improvement of schooling in Florida. Past studies have linked school improvement with parental and community participation (Epstein, 1992; Fantini, 1980; Henderson, 1987). The legislature expected parental and community participation in decisions that most closely affected the schools and students would provide the impetus for change and improvement in Florida's schools. Placing authority in the hands of parents and community members through participation in local SACs would realize benefits for students. "The closer the parent is to the education of the child, the greater the impact on child development and educational achievement" (Fullan & Stiegelbauer, 1991, p.227). This belief guided the development of the SACs in Florida.

Background to the Study

Florida has a long history of educational reform emanating from the legislature. The past twenty years have seen the legislature passing numerous laws that affected local schools in an effort to provide a quality education for all students in the state. These attempts at change and improvement were implemented with varying degrees of success.

In 1973, the Florida Legislature passed major educational legislation designed to make schools more accountable (Omnibus Education Act of 1973). Legislation required schools to publish an expanded Annual Public Report to include financial information, student test scores, data concerning teacher qualifications, and student, faculty, and parent attitudes about the school. The purpose of the expanded annual report was to keep the parents and community informed about the school and aware of areas needing improvement. This law also mandated the establishment of school advisory committees.

Major changes in the funding of schools also occurred in 1973 when the legislature created the Florida Education Finance Program (Florida Statutes, Section 236.02). This complex funding formula was intended to equalize resources for all schools across the state and provide a quality education for all the children of Florida. It established a new method of financing education in Florida according to educational needs.

The next major law affecting education in Florida was the Educational Accountability Act of 1976. The purpose of this law was to guarantee each student similar educational opportunities regardless of where they lived and to provide information about program costs and effectiveness. Decision makers would use the information gathered to insure that all children in Florida were provided educational programs that met the minimum state requirements and to provide information about the school's performance to the public. Statewide assessment and graduation standards were developed to correlate with national attempts to measure student progress and were expected to provide comparative information about schools in order to make improvements. This law also required local school boards to develop a Pupil Progression Plan and established standards for high school graduation that included completion of minimum credits and demonstration of mastery of basic skills.

Continuing with active participation in educational policy making, in 1978, the legislature took a different approach to improving educational accountability by focusing on the requirements for teachers. Teachers were required to pass a written examination that demonstrated competencies in reading, writing, listening, mathematics, and the ability to understand and counsel children in the areas of physical, social, and academic development. This bill was the start of what would become the Florida Beginning Teacher Program (O'Farrell, 1991).

The next several years saw changes in the requirements for school principals (Florida Statutes, Section 229.595) and the introduction of computer data reporting in Florida (Florida Statutes, Section 229.555). School districts now could transmit data on student test scores directly to the state and information could be shared through the Florida Information Resource Network (FIRN).

In 1983 the Legislature passed what is commonly referred to as the RAISE Bill. This legislation raised the credit requirements and required students to have a 1.5 grade point average to gain a diploma. The law required local school systems to develop student performance standards for each course based on the state standards and require mastery to earn credit for the course. Another major bill that affected school accountability was the Educational Reform Act of 1983. This Act permitted a merit-pay plan for teachers and required the commissioner to develop a comprehensive state plan for math, science, and computers. School districts in Florida responded positively toward the plan for improvement of math and science (Dana & Shaw, 1992). However, Florida dropped the merit-pay plan three years after implementation because of controversy and administrative complexities (Firestone, Fuhrman, & Kirst, 1991).

In 1984 several changes in state statute were made that affected accountability. The Merit Schools Program was adopted. Vocational education programs were required to show a 70% completion rate for three years or lose funding. More standardization of assessments, curriculum, and textbooks was

mandated. Curriculum frameworks were evaluated and revised and performance standards were set for all levels, not just high schools. Finally, schools were required to include comparative rankings of Florida with other states and the districts with each other on nationally normed tests and state student performance measures in their annual reports.

Despite the changes in curriculum, graduation requirements and higher standards for teachers and principals, schools in Florida were still in need of improvement. In 1991, the Florida Legislature established a new accountability and school improvement program that consisted of four statutes commonly called Blueprint 2000. The areas of change involved comprehensive revision and implementation of Florida's system of school improvement and educational responsibility (Florida Statutes, Section 229.591 and 229.592). The legislation established the Florida Commission on Education Reform and Accountability (Florida Statutes, Section 229.593), and specified the powers and duties of the Commission (Florida Statutes, Section 229.594). These laws brought new challenges to schools in Florida as they strove to implement policies in ways that positively impacted student outcomes.

One thread that wove through the fabric of educational reform in Florida was a desire to involve the public through information and participation on school committees. Another component was to obtain useful data to compare students and schools with others as measures of progress. While these areas remained a

priority, an important change rested in the implementation of the policies. The focus of school improvement moved from curricular oriented reforms to system or process reforms.

Blueprint 2000 placed the initiative and responsibility for reform on to the local districts and schools. It did not dictate programs to schools, but required that schools and districts make progress toward the state goals. The schools were given the freedom to design programs that they believed would best meet the needs of their students. All community members were encouraged to become active participants in accepting and carrying out this responsibility.

As a part of the Florida reform initiatives, Florida law (Florida Statutes, Section 229.58) required district school boards to establish school advisory committees (SAC). These committees were required to be broadly representative of the community and include teachers, students, parents, and other citizens (Families in School, p.25). The SAC was charged with the responsibility of assisting schools in preparing required school planning documents and annual reports. In addition, the members were to assist in the development of school improvement plans.

Overview of the Literature

The role of the SAC in policy implementation encompasses several interrelated fields of research. Research in parental and community involvement, policy implementation, and studies on local and state relations in policy

implementation were important in developing this study. Effective schools research, while not of primary emphasis, highlighted the need to review more recent knowledge on facilitating change in educational systems. Linking research on parental involvement with studies on facilitating change was a key element in the development of the study.

Significant research in the field of education has been devoted to the improvement of schools. Investigation into effective practices, leadership, facilities, curriculum, and organizational structure have been topics of inquiry for many years. The more recent addition to the study of school improvement has been the focus on parental involvement in education and site-based governance. In the last fifteen years a substantial body of research has addressed the importance of parental and community involvement to the improvement of schools (Epstein, 1992; Fantini, 1980; Henderson, 1987) with mixed conclusions.

The uncertainty of the conclusions surrounding parental involvement in school decision-making may be a matter of poor implementation rather than fault with the concept of community or parental involvement. Consequently, an extensive search of implementation studies was undertaken to determine a theoretical framework for the study.

A review of the history of policy implementation studies uncovered at least three generally agreed on generations of development. The first generation of policy implementation studies sought to determine the relationship between

policies and the programs implemented (McLaughlin, 1987). These were followed by the more sophisticated studies of the second phase, which zeroed in on the relationship between policy and practice (Elmore, 1979; Firestone, 1989; McLaughlin, 1987; Peterson, Rabe, and Wong, 1986). The third generation of policy implementation research focused not only on implementation, but also on how to enhance effectiveness (Darling-Hammond, 1990; Lerner, 1986; Mazzoni, 1991; McLaughlin, 1987).

Studies of implementation of specific state policies revealed the intricacy in the relationships between state and local education agencies (Dentler, 1984; Fuhrman, 1988; Fuhrman, Clune, & Elmore, 1991; Marsh & Odden, 1991; Turnbull, 1984). The research in policy implementation emphasized the importance of studying the relationship between the policy and the program, the policy and the practice, and the local context. Research highlighted the complex process of implementation and emphasized the need to understand local circumstances to adequately evaluate the process of implementation. "Policy can not always mandate what matters to outcomes at the local level" (McLaughlin, 1987, p.171).

Using this framework it became clear that to grasp what was happening in the SAC it was important to understand the local factors. The evidence supported the view that through careful examination of information gathered directly from the perspective of the implementers we would have the best chance for

understanding the nature of change and the factors impacting the implementation of Florida's school accountability legislation.

Methods

Inquiry regarding what was happening within the SAC and how participants were defining their roles and interpreting and implementing policy could not be accomplished by surveys and questionnaires alone. The research should describe the role and function of the SAC from the members' perspective and contribute to understanding the processes and activities that defined the scope of the SAC and not simply report information on the SAC.

The nature of the questions suggested the correctness of using qualitative methodology for the study. Interviews with SAC members and observations of meetings were deemed the most appropriate techniques to discover the meaning of what was happening in the development of the SAC.

The first step of the study was to identify four SACs to investigate. This was accomplished by the distribution of a questionnaire (Appendix A) containing demographic questions about the school and the operation of the SAC to principals and SAC chairpersons of all 147 public schools in Duval County. From the results of this survey four elementary schools were chosen for in-depth study.

The next phase of the research consisted of gathering data from the identified schools. Observations of meetings, interviews with principals and other team members, and review of written documents and records were conducted by

the researcher. Data analysis followed procedures presented by Marshall and Rossman (1989). Emphasis was placed on the process of the study to allow flexibility in data collection and analysis in order to develop an understanding of the role of the SAC from the participant's perspective.

Following guidelines for qualitative research outlined by Bogdan and Biklen (1992), care was taken to insure rigor within a natural setting while inductively seeking to discover answers and meaning to the questions surrounding how the members of the SAC defined their roles and functions in implementing the policy initiatives of Blueprint 2000.

Organization of the Study

Chapter 1 presented a concise overview of the entire study. It included the introduction, provided historical background information important to establish the context for the research, established the purpose, briefly outlined the areas of literature to be reviewed and addressed the methodology that would be utilized.

Chapter 2 examines the related literature relevant to implementation of school improvement initiatives by school advisory councils. First, the chapter reviews the literature on parental and community involvement in school improvement. Second, the literature on policy implementation is presented with a sub-section devoted specifically to issues involving the implementation of state policies concerning education. The third section of the chapter addresses the literature supporting the theoretical framework for the study. Social

constructivism and systems theory are reviewed with an emphasis on their relationship to the study.

Chapter 3 describes the setting for the research, establishes the rationale for a qualitative study, and presents the design and methodology for the study. In addition, Chapter 3 clearly outlines the procedures followed during the data gathering and analysis phases of the study.

Chapter 4 presents the findings of the study including analysis of the questionnaire and written materials, observations, and interviews. Insight into how the members of the SACs define their roles and responsibilities gained by the researcher during the process of the study will be offered for consideration.

Chapter 5 will discuss and develop conclusions and recommendations based on the information presented in Chapter 4. Finally, a summary of the study including possible areas for further investigation will be presented.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Introduction

The primary purpose of this study was to investigate the role of the SAC in the implementation of Florida school improvement initiatives in four Duval County elementary schools. This chapter of the study will review the literature relevant to the background and support for the study.

The school improvement legislation in Florida which mandated school advisory councils implied that community and parental involvement in education would lead to improvement in schools. In order to test this assumption a review of relevant literature on the school improvement and parental, community participation was needed. In addition, a review of research on implementation and state and local relationships was indicated since the guidelines for the establishment and operation of SACs was mandated by the state.

After a brief discussion of the historical perspectives surrounding school effectiveness and accountability, the first section of this chapter provides a concise review of the literature related to parent involvement in schools and the relationship to school improvement. Research studies that identified both

instructional and non-instructional modes of parental and community involvement were reviewed. Emphasis was placed on research studies that investigated school governance models and their impact on school improvement.

Second, a historical overview of policy implementation studies is presented. This section traces three generations of policy implementation studies and identifies factors which have been shown to impact policy implementation. Additional research on educational change and the relationship between state policy and local implementation also is reviewed in the context of policy implementation.

The final section of this chapter addresses the theoretical framework for the study. The importance of understanding how SAC members perceived the roles, rules and responsibilities of the SAC is substantiated through a review of the theories of social construction of reality and the social systems model.

Historical Perspective

Historically, school improvement initiatives have focused on providing educators with effective practices and practical tips to improve instruction. As significant as this is to the field of education, research on the manner in which effective practices were transmitted to the local schools and put into practice was minimal. In this era of encouraging change in the schools, the need for research in the area of implementation has become paramount. As Holmes stated, "The

central practical problem facing the movement today is one of implementation" (1989, p. 10).

Improvement of schools requires consideration of two different concepts. It is one matter to know what factors make a school effective and entirely another to put the knowledge into practice in different schools with different environments. The first issue involving the effective practices for schools has been extensively researched in the last forty years. Researchers have been systematically identifying and documenting factors such as time on task, high expectations by teachers, school climate, and parental and community involvement as enhancing instruction. A review article by Purkey and Smith (1983) provided an excellent summary of this literature. Educators have only to look around to locate school effectiveness literature.

The second issue of implementation also has been thoroughly researched. Studies have been made of policy implementation, including federal and state programs in the field of education, and have provided insights which have helped educators make changes. Several generations of policy studies have guided both educators and legislators through years of reforms.

Improving Florida's schools has been a goal for citizens, educators, and legislators throughout Florida's history. The State Legislature has dominated educational policy making in Florida since the early 1970s (Fuhrman, 1988; O'Farrell, 1991). The governor and legislature in Florida have played an active

role in initiating reform even when educators were being more reluctant (Fuhrman, 1988).

After twenty years of accountability legislation, a subtle change occurred in the early 1990s in the focus of the legislation in Florida. A shift was made from mandated standards and imposed graduation requirements to emphasis on the structure of the school and the involvement of the community in making improvements. Through a variety of measures, parents, and community members were encouraged to become involved in the improvement of schools. This change began in 1989, when the use of lottery funds was first passed on to schools to improve productivity of high school students (Florida Statutes, Section 236.1228). The emphasis was placed more on qualitative measures of school improvement rather than simply on test scores. The goals were to improve the effective use of resources and to increase the involvement of parents and community members (O'Farrell, 1991).

Parent Involvement

Research conducted in the last fifteen years demonstrated the importance of parental and community involvement to the improvement in schools (Epstein, 1992; Fantini, 1980; Henderson, 1987; Moore, 1992). Henderson (1987) summarized a review of forty-nine research studies on the effects of parental involvement on student achievement and school effectiveness. Her review supports the positive relationship between parental involvement and success of

students and schools. In general, the more control a school had over those features of its organization that affects its performance, the more likely the school was to exhibit those characteristics that demonstrate a quality educational process (Henderson, 1987). Overall, school improvement has been linked to parental or community involvement.

Communities and parents have historically played a critical role in the education of children. Whether approving school taxes, electing school boards or simply talking to the teacher, parents and community members have been actively involved in schools. However, there has been confusion over what is meant by parental involvement. Epstein (1992) identified six different types of school and family partnerships. These relationships vary from helping children with homework to involvement in decision making and governance at the schools. Fullan and Stiegelbauer (1991) categorized the forms of parental involvement as either instructional or non-instructional based on their direct impact on student learning. Parental involvement in learning activities at home, such as assisting with homework or providing tutors, and parental involvement at school, such as serving as volunteers or room parents, are considered to be instructional forms of parental involvement (Fullan & Stiegelbauer, 1991). Activities involving communication between the home or community and school and participation in school committees like PTA or advisory boards are considered non-instructional.

Using this grouping, school governance committees or SACs can be classified as a non-instructional form of parental involvement.

Research studies of instructional forms of parental involvement have indicated that even though parental involvement may take several forms it positively impacts performance at school (Henderson, 1987; Keesling, Melarango, Robbins, & Smith, 1981; Moore, 1992). Studies focusing on federal and state initiated programs such as Head Start (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Mowry, 1972) and Chapter I (Keesling et al., 1981) found programs where parent participation was high and consisted of a variety of types of involvement, the benefits to students and achievement were greater. Even though the focus of participation may be on improving the home environment, the effect was to improve the child's performance at school. When the home provided a positive learning environment that included high expectations, positive attitudes toward school, parents who assisted students with homework, and frequent contact with the school, then student achievement was greater (Henderson, 1987). The evaluation of the Head Start program by Bronfenbrenner (1979) concluded that the variable that contributed the most to improvement of schools was parental participation and involvement. Keesling and others (1981) also concluded that there were benefits to students, parents, and schools when there was active parent participation and involvement.

The research conducted in parental involvement in school governance has been less extensive and less conclusive than the research in instructional forms of participation. Stearns and Peterson (1973) in their study on compensatory education programs concluded that the effects of parent involvement in governance type activities on student achievement were difficult to evaluate. Wagenaar (1977) found that schools with high community involvement and support had higher levels of student achievement. However, he could not link actual participation in decision-making to student achievement. Swap (1990) suggested that the reason there are no conclusive links between parent involvement in decision-making and student achievement is because frequently it is just "window dressing" (p. 67). From these studies, the consensus is that local participation in school governance, school-based decision-making, or organizational structures has little impact on student achievement (Fantini, 1980; Fullan & Stiegelbauer, 1991; Henderson, 1987; Swap, 1990). "There is little evidence to suggest that parent involvement in governance affects learning in the school, although there may be other benefits and indirect effects" (Fullan & Stiegelbauer, 1991, p. 237).

However, Henderson (1987) in her review of different studies of parental involvement in schools concluded, "The evidence is now beyond dispute: children do better in school and they go to better schools" (p.1). The studies reviewed included a variety of forms of parental involvement and considered success

beyond student achievement. Smith and Nerenberg (1981), in their studies of federal Follow Through programs, concluded that parent participation materially affected the quality of education provided to students. In another study by Herman and Yeh (1980), parent involvement in decision-making was shown to have contributed to greater parent satisfaction in schools. Fantini (1980) concluded that while parental involvement in school governance had no significant impact on student achievement, it did improve the self-concept of the student. These diverse views reinforce the need to continue investigation into the impact of parental and community participation in decision-making and governance in schools.

Parental involvement in school governance is not a new idea growing out of the restructuring movement of the 1980s. There have been examples of parental involvement in school governance for many years. One model of parental governance was in the Ocean Hill-Brownsville school district of New York City during the 1960s. This model provided for a governing board composed of parents and community representatives who had the power to hire administrators, decide budgetary issues, design curriculum, and plan staff development. A number of studies conducted on the Ocean Hill-Brownsville model report conflicting findings as to its success (Taylor & Lewis, 1988).

Other examples of early parent involvement in school governance occurred in the New Haven Public Schools in conjunction with the Yale Child Study Center

and in the decentralization experiences of the Detroit and New York City schools. In these examples, parental control was not as extensive as in the Ocean Hill-Brownsville model, and again the conclusions reached by researchers on the impact of parent participation on student achievement was mixed (Taylor & Lewis, 1988).

More recent studies conducted in school systems that have adopted local school councils or school-based decision-making models have shown conflicting conclusions. Most confirm benefits to the schools, but not necessarily in the area of student achievement. For example, studies in Dade County, Florida, reported increased teacher status and applications for teacher openings increased (Bradley & Olson, 1993). Yet, Dr. Fernandez, who was superintendent at the time school based decision making was implemented, stated "the evidence is not yet in" about whether what has been done in Dade County will have the intended desirable consequences (Sarason, 1991). Also, Kentucky will not have results available from the impact of the Kentucky Education Reform Act until 1994 to determine whether the approximately 400 schools that had formed councils by June, 1992, had higher achievement than those without councils (Steffy, 1993). A survey in Chicago found improved perceptions of schools on the part of parents, principals, teachers and community representatives (Bradley & Olson, 1993). Positive outcomes for schools can be demonstrated, but links to student achievement are still tenuous at best.

The number of school systems utilizing forms of local site-based governance councils is increasing and research studies of parental involvement in school governance are becoming more prevalent. Malen and Ogawa (1988) studied the Salt Lake City, Utah schools to determine the influence of school councils on influencing policy. They discovered that despite the existence of a structure that should favor the councils' potential they did not wield significant influence on important issues. Hill and Bonan (1991) conducted a study of five major urban and suburban school districts across the country that had adopted site-based management with a variety of parent-staff relationships. Their findings indicated that school governance was not just a local school phenomena, but required system-wide change. It required rethinking accountability, and the school system must support the reform. The schools utilizing site-based management evolved over time and developed unique characteristics and operating styles.

The Chicago School Reform Act of 1988 probably has received the greatest scrutiny of districts attempting to place the responsibility of school governance and improvement at the local school level. Numerous research studies conducted by the Consortium on Chicago School Research have provided valuable insight into this structure for schools (Easton, 1991; Hess & Easton, 1992; Moore, 1992). Under this Act, Local School Councils (LSCs) were given the power to adopt a school improvement plan, adopt a school budget, and to select the principal.

Research from Chicago for school year 1990-91 showed that Local School Councils were composed of active and educated members, met frequently, and discussed a number of different topics. The research also revealed that the discussions centered around procedural and administrative issues over 47% of the time and curricular and instructional issues were addressed only 12.4% of the time (Easton, 1991). However, it would be a mistake to conclude that there has been no contribution to improving instruction. The LSCs, through quality school improvement plans, did facilitate change in schools where the staff was open to making improvements. From the study of the LSCs and the improvement plans, the Chicago evaluation identified factors that encouraged instructional improvement. The study concluded that although not all of Chicago's 540 schools were successful, innovative instructional change did take place.

The special challenge to promote success for school governance activities is to encourage involvement of parental leaders from all groups in the community and provide training in communication and decision making skills (Epstein, 1992). Committees should have membership from all racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic groups in the community. Parental involvement is most effective when parents have clear guidelines and training for participation, and involvement is well planned and long lasting (Henderson, 1987). School governance is a form of participatory democracy and as such should be continued and encouraged.

Findings from research have provided conditions that must be present if parent and community involvement is to significantly improve student and school performance. First, the key unit for decision-making must be at the school level (Moore, 1992; Swap, 1990). Second, all stakeholders must be involved and parents must be in the majority (Moore, 1992) and principals have no veto power (Swap, 1990). Third, the council must have significant decision-making authority in areas critical for school improvement (Moore, 1992). Fourth, there must be incentives that encourage the council to focus on improvement (Moore, 1992). Fifth, the council members must receive training in their responsibilities and processes of team building, collaboration, group dynamics and decision-making (Moore, 1992; Swap, 1990). Finally, the authority of the district office and school board must be decreased (Moore, 1992). Similar factors were discovered in active parent advisory councils for federal programs (Keesling et al., 1981).

For school governance committees to have significant influence on school policy Malen and Ogawa (1988) suggested four important factors. The council must be located at the local school level. The councils should be given formal policy-making authority, and serve not just as advisors. Care must be taken to insure that all members have an equal vote and all members are properly trained in the operation of schools as well as group dynamics.

In Florida, the SACs have not been given powers as broad as those recommended by research or given to school councils in Kentucky or Chicago.

For example, in Kentucky, the statutes define the membership categories, limit the total number of members from each category, set length of terms, and require the local school board to adopt policies regarding the implementation of the school-based decision making (Steffy, 1993). In addition, the Kentucky Education Reform Act identified eight areas where councils could adopt policy and require that principals must implement policies adopted by the councils in the designated areas. These areas include curriculum issues, school schedule, selection of instructional materials, policies for students and faculty regarding attendance, discipline, and participation in extra curricular activities. In Chicago, school councils have the authority to adopt a school improvement plan, to adopt a school budget, and to select the principal to serve under a four year contract (Hess & Easton, 1992). SACs in Florida are considered advisory boards without the power to select the principal or develop the school budget. Their main function is stated as, "to assist in the preparation and evaluation of the school improvement plan, pursuant to Section 230.23 (18), and shall provide the principal such assistance as the principal may request in preparing the school's annual budget and plan as required by Section 229.555 (1)" (School Advisory Council Handbook). The differences between the behaviors and effectiveness of Kentucky, Chicago, and Florida school councils require additional study to determine if the conclusions of the Chicago Research Consortium will be supported in Florida.

Most researchers of school governance have suggested that broad jurisdiction and direct authority are necessary for school based governance to influence policy. However, in research on power relationships in schools, Dunlap and Goldman (1991) identified a concept referred to as facilitative power that may describe how groups without direct authority may operate. Facilitative power, according to Dunlap and Goldman, is power that is manifested through someone rather than over someone. It allows the organization to collectively create conditions that would enhance its objectives being achieved. Whether the SACs in the study are effective without the authority given to Chicago and Salt Lake City schools or if the concept of facilitative power provides an effective means to accomplish goals will need to be observed.

Despite the conflicting and often confusing evidence on the effectiveness of parental involvement in school governance activities, school advisory councils should not be abandoned. Research has not conclusively determined the reason for the conflicting results. The lack of success may be a matter of poor implementation rather than failure in the concept of school advisory councils. This and future studies should investigate not only the interactions of the members of the SAC with each other and the school personnel, but the process of implementing the policies that define school advisory councils.

Policy Implementation Studies

The second area of research that is important to review in connection with putting a new policy or program into operation is the one of implementation. "Implementation consists of the process of putting into practice an idea, program, or set of activities and structures new to the people attempting or expected to change" (Fullan & Stiegelbauer, 1991, p. 65). Van Meter and Van Horn (1975) are even more explicit. They define implementation as, "encompassing those actions by private and public individuals or groups that are directed at the achievement of objectives set forth in prior policy decisions" (p.447). Other researchers describe implementation as a process of mutual adaptation (Browne & Wildavsky, 1984), an evolutionary process (Majone & Wildavsky, 1977) or a process of negotiation (Erickson, 1988).

The study of policy implementation is a relatively recent phenomenon that began in the area of political science. During the 1970s there was concern over the success or lack of success of the social programs of Lyndon Johnson's "Great Society." Researchers began to study the programs and according to McLaughlin (1987), this first generation of policy implementation research discovered the uncertain relationships between the policies and the programs as they were being implemented. This generation of researchers concluded that there were inevitable conflicts between the local goals, priorities, and abilities and the state or federally initiated or mandated policies (Odden & Marsh, 1988). The conclusions of the

researchers were that conflict was inevitable, and programs would rarely get implemented as they were planned.

By the early 1980s implementation research began to focus on the relationship between policy and practice. These studies were concerned with what factors encouraged or hindered the implementation. During this period the state and federal government began to increase involvement in education. The federal government passed legislation concerning education and provided funds to states for special programs for handicapped and economically disadvantaged students, and vocational training.

In Florida this increased involvement in education was evidenced by greater legislative action to make schools more accountable (Educational Accountability Act of 1976), to raise professional leadership and certification requirements (Management Training Act of 1979), and define student performance standards (RAISE Bill of 1983). All of these actions by the state government increased the interest in how state policies were being implemented at the local level.

From this second stage of implementation inquiry researchers developed theories to explain why programs were implemented successfully or not. McLaughlin (1987) considered the concepts of will and capacity of the implementer as important to implementation. Capacity is defined as the ability to make it happen and will is the motivation or commitment to make it happen. She

demonstrated that these abilities would vary in different situations, thus explaining why some programs worked and others didn't.

Another theory explained implementation based on the type of program. Programs were identified as being either developmental or redistributive and the implementation process for each was different (Peterson, Rabe and Wong, 1986). Supporters of this view further contended that developmental programs, such as curriculum and vocational education, were usually implemented fairly quickly because local governments or schools were already involved in them. Developmental programs usually provided additional resources to expand the services they were already providing. On the other hand redistributive programs were more difficult to implement because they required more service to be provided to some clients, students, than to others. Special education, compensatory education, and desegregation assistance are examples of redistributive programs. The implementation of redistributive programs required regulation and monitoring and was usually an antagonistic situation.

As the interest in the field of policy implementation studies increased, more researchers began to apply these concepts to education. Firestone (1989) utilized McLaughlin's framework to review state educational initiatives implementation and suggested that the type of policy - mandate, regulation, or incentive - also makes a difference. He concluded that policy makers need to learn to develop policies more likely to have positive results (p. 162).

Other important variables to predicting successful implementation were the regulatory nature of the change (Kirst & Meister, 1985) and the initiation point of policy making (Elmore, 1979). Regulatory change is usually more successful because it does not require change in the professional behavior of the implementer or teacher. Regulatory changes impact the structure of the school and are likely to involve issues like school schedules, and credit or exam requirements. Elmore suggested that the initiation point of policy making may be to start with the desired outcomes and then move backward to determine the best methods of producing them. He emphasized the nature of "backward mapping" or change starting at the point of impact as being the most logical (p. 616).

When reviewing information related to educational change or factors affecting implementation, Fullan is frequently cited. Fullan and Stiegelbauer (1991) identified a comprehensive set of factors they believe influence implementation. From research over the last twenty years Fullan identified nine critical factors organized into three main categories that are key factors in the implementation process. They are (1) characteristics of the change, (2) local roles, and (3) external factors (Fullan & Stiegelbauer, 1991, p.68). The characteristics of change includes the need for the change, the clarity of the goals, the complexity or difficulty of the proposed change, and the quality or practicality of the program. The local factors consist of those factors more closely associated with a school system like the community, district, school, principal, and teachers. The

government and other agencies constitute the external factors. This research strengthens the argument that determining the local conditions surrounding the SAC is important to determine the success of the implementation of SAC as a component of school improvement in Florida. The more factors which are present supporting the implementation the more successful the implementation is likely to be.

The third generation of implementation research centered on not only getting programs implemented, but also how to ensure they were effective. It is in this phase that we now find ourselves. Several researchers (Darling-Hammond, 1990; Lerner, 1986; Mazzoni, 1991; McLaughlin, 1987) have tackled the problem and determined that for effective program implementation the emphasis must be on the micro or implementer level. Using McLaughlin's (1991) research as a foundation, the implementation issues in education can be summarized as: (1) what do the school level implementers know about effective practice; (2) how can schools be motivated to address their problems; (3) what skills do the implementers expect to be needed in the practices they need to apply; and (4) how can policies at the district, state, or federal level be designed to assist schools?

Researchers have determined that it is not productive to study the implementation of programs or policies in isolation; they must be viewed as a part of the larger system (Fuhrman, 1988). Darling-Hammond (1990) stressed the need to view implementation from the perspective of the understandings and context of

those who are most affected by the policy. It is the perceptions and understandings of the implementers that most influence the effectiveness of the implementation. Policy is never dropped into a pristine environment. Local factors must always be considered (Darling-Hammond, 1990; Dreeben and Barr, 1983; Fullan & Miles, 1992; Fullan & Stiegelbauer, 1991; Odden & Marsh, 1988). Financial resources, teacher and parent expectations, student needs, philosophies of education, motivation, and district support are a few of the factors which may impact the implementation.

Relationships between the state and the local schools are complicated by a number of intervening factors. Factors identified include the multiplicity of components that comprise the "state," the effect of the actions of intermediate districts and agencies that mediate the influence the state's efforts (Firestone, 1984), variability in the state's involvement in educational matters, and the fluctuations over time in the state's activities and involvement. In addition, the political framework of the state, including availability of resources, state expenditures for education, attention to policy and citizen preferences, must be considered when studying implementation (Elmore, 1979). Dentler (1984) studied the relationship as active involvement of the state including the ability and willingness to provide and support technical assistance and regulation. While most studies have focused on the state as the primary partner in the relationship,

Turnbull (1984) emphasized that the relationship is two-way and the local education agency also controlled the outcome.

Specific studies of the implementation of state initiated policies became more numerous during the decade of the 80s. Studies on state initiated high school reform (Odden & Marsh, 1987), math and science curriculum reform (Dana & Shaw, 1992; Marsh, 1988; Marsh & Odden, 1991), curriculum reform in middle schools (Marsh, Brown, Crocker, & Lewis, 1989), and long term studies of federal programs (McLaughlin, 1991) added to the growing body of research and knowledge on state policy and its role in school improvement.

A summary of the research indicated that state policy had the best chance of being successfully implemented when vision is present (Firestone, 1989; Fullan & Stiegelbauer, 1991; Marsh & Odden, 1991), resources including technical assistance are sufficient (Marsh & Odden, 1991; Odden & Odden, 1984), the requirements are clear (Fullan & Stiegelbauer, 1991; Sabatier & Mazmanian, 1980), the goals are congruent with local preferences (Fullan & Stiegelbauer, 1991), and the policy remains stable over time (Sabatier & Mazmanian, 1980). More recent studies have demonstrated the variability of the first findings of the Rand study and others (McLaughlin, 1991). It appears that while the state may play a major role in initiating change, it is the ability of the local school to implement and sustain change which will lead to success.

Local school districts serve an important role as a mediator of change (Firestone, 1989). They provide the direct assistance, financial resources, staff, time, and environment for the policy or change to take place. Research has indicated that the district can assist in the management of change (Fullan & Miles, 1992) and can serve as an external facilitator to schools. Through these different contexts it is expected that different schools will reach the state goals in different ways (Fuhrman, Clune, & Elmore, 1991; Odden & Odden, 1984). McLaughlin (1991) in a review of the Rand Change Agent Study concluded that "local choices about how a policy is put into practice have more significance for policy outcomes than do such policy features as technology, program design, funding levels, or governance requirements" (p.147).

Each school district in Florida has its own unique local context or culture that will affect the implementation of policy. It is important to remember this context. "Change cannot occur from afar. Local implementation by everyday teachers, principals, parents and students is the only way change happens" (Fullan & Miles, 1992, p. 752).

While concentration on the local level is important, one cannot forget the macro perspective. An added component of the third generation of implementation studies involves not only centering the research at the local level, but in integrating the world of the policy makers with that of the implementers (Betts, 1992; Lerner, 1986; Mazzoni, 1991; Odden & Marsh, 1988). Research

should focus on both the micro (local school) and macro (state/federal) level when analyzing issues of content and implementation. Studies of implementation of educational policies should integrate the analysis of the content of the reform, the process of its implementation in the local setting, and its effects (Odden & Marsh, 1988, p.45). The perspective of each level must be considered when analyzing implementation. It would be dangerous to adopt only one perspective in viewing a policy and its impact (Lerner, 1986).

One reason for this approach is that the objectives for reform of education in the 1990s are very different from the objectives of the past. During the 1960s and 1970s the programs initiated by the state and federal government were most likely to be categorical and redistributive. They were aimed at a specific population of students or curriculum project. In contrast, the current wave of reform initiated during the 1980s targets the entire educational system (Odden & Marsh, 1988). The goal is usually stated to improve the quality of education.

In summary, the literature emphasized the need to integrate an analysis of both the local and state level activities to better understand the implementation of policy. Quality education is the result of complex relationships that can best be studied through careful examination of information gathered directly from the implementers. This perspective provides the best chance for comprehending the factors and culture that influence the implementation of Florida's School Accountability legislation.

The Florida Accountability legislation mandates the seven goals for education and placed the responsibility for these goals on those closest to the students. It is the schools, parents, and teachers who were given the responsibility for implementing this legislation. At first review this mandate appears to be a straightforward situation for creative problem-solving. However, as one digs deeper, the challenges begin to materialize. What effective practices should be implemented? Who should be on the SAC? What will the SAC actually be doing? How will the SAC function? What decisions can the SAC make? It is the answers to these questions, pertaining to the roles, rules, and responsibilities of the SAC and the process by which they are answered that impact the implementation of the policy.

The literature emphasized the importance of the process of implementation to the success of policy adoption. This study will concentrate on the process and procedures of implementation as well as how the members perceive their responsibilities to fully understand the development of the SAC and its role in improvement of schools in Florida.

Social Construction

One theoretical framework that served as an impetus for the importance of studying the function of the roles, rules, and responsibilities of the SAC was derived from sociology and the study of the social construction of reality. This framework emphasized the significance of individuals and their relationships in the

social structures or institutions that they construct. Individuals help create the roles and rules of social institutions that in turn help to create their perceptions of reality. In this sense members of the SAC are constructing their own understanding of their function to the effectiveness of the SAC. Since mandated development of the SAC in Florida was a new concept, the local implementation of the SAC provided opportunity to study the evolution of roles, expectations, and reality as it occurred.

The enabling legislation created guidelines for the SAC to follow in the development of by-laws, membership, and operating procedures. The purpose and goals of the SAC were defined, yet flexibility was allowed. The members SAC were provided the opportunity, individually and collectively, to arrive at their own definition of roles, rules, and responsibilities within the parameters provided by the state. As the members of the SAC defined their roles and began to institutionalize their functions, the SAC then would be expected to take on a life of its own with a capacity to impact policy implementation and school improvement beyond the capacity of the individual members. The SAC would then have its own power to influence individuals joining the SAC both now and in the future. Berger and Luckmann (1966) stated that, "If an institution can be understood only in terms of knowledge that the members have of it, it follows that the analysis of such knowledge will be essential for the analysis of the institution in question" (p.61).

By Berger and Luckmann's (1966) definition, knowledge consists of "what everybody knows" (p.61), and includes beliefs, values, facts, and maxims. This knowledge controls and predicts conduct and influences our roles. It is through playing roles that individuals participate in society and the analysis of roles provides insight into how individuals determine meaning and relate to society. Simply stated, it is important to study the roles, rules, and responsibilities individuals define for themselves in order to understand the organization they have constructed.

Getzels and Guba in their social systems model described roles as being important in the functioning of institutions and defined roles in terms of position or status, expectations, and rights and responsibilities conferred on the position (Hoy & Miskel, 1987). Roles may be flexible and are influenced by others in the system. Again, similar to the social constructivists' views, it is individuals and organizations which determine the environment of the organization or social system. The actions of one person, changes in the membership, or different mandates from the district cause a ripple effect that changes both the organization and the people. Nothing stands independent or alone in a social system. Both individuals and the organization interact creating new structures, which in turn produce new expectations and patterns of behavior. As an institution composed of individuals, impacted by both external forces and subject to internal needs, the SAC will be continuously evolving. Whatever the members of the SAC view as

their role and responsibility will impact the implementation of the school improvement initiatives. This interaction within the SAC could be a major determinant in the implementation of state policy.

Just as individuals construct their own reality, policy implementation shapes the policy (Musella, 1989, p.108). The methods that the SAC utilizes to improve schools within their local contexts is important to understanding the relationship between policy formation and policy implementation. Actions, resources, individuals, their roles, and the environment are continually transforming policy. These processes and conditions need to be studied in the context of the local school to fully comprehend what is happening to state mandated policy as it is implemented in the school.

Summary

Based on a review of the literature in implementation theory, both educational and general, the researcher believed that for this study to be constructive it must address the issues of implementation at the school-level and focus on the understandings and perceptions of the School Advisory Council members. It is the perceptions of the members of the SAC that are important in determining what roles and responsibilities the SAC will accept.

The literature in parental and community involvement in school governance highlighted the need for further inquiry to conclusively determine the impact on student achievement. In Florida, the legislature assumed that parental and

community involvement through the local SAC would lead to school improvement, greater accountability, and increased student achievement. This study was intended to investigate the relationship between the SAC and its role in implementing parent governance activities and school improvement.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

This chapter describes the research setting and the methodology of the study. First, a brief description of the Duval County Public Schools will be presented as background for understanding the setting where the study was conducted. Then a rationale for the use of the qualitative methodology and the specific design of the study will be presented.

Setting

The school district selected for study was a large urban school district located in northeast Florida. The school district encompassed over 847 square miles and served over 118,000 students. The schools served both urban and suburban populations and the racial balance at the time of the study was approximately 40% black, 56% white, and 4% other. While the district attempted to maintain an equal racial balance in all schools, there were schools where the racial balance was not representative of the district average. There were 99 elementary schools, grades K-5, 22 middle schools, grades 6-8, 17 high schools, grades 9-12, 3 exceptional student centers, 3 vocational skills centers, and 3

special schools for alternative educational programs for a total of 147 schools in the district.

Four schools that represented the diversity of school size, racial balance, and socio-economic level of the school district were chosen for investigation based on response to a questionnaire sent to all schools in the district. A brief description of the elementary schools that were chosen for study follows.

School 1, located in an affluent suburban section of the city, had an enrollment of approximately 1560 students. At the time of the study the racial/ethnic composition of the school was approximately 91% white, 7% black, and 2% Asian and Hispanic. Less than 8% of the students were eligible for free or reduced lunch and no students were eligible for federal compensatory education programs. Students at this school consistently ranked at the top of the district on scores on national achievement tests.

School 2 was located in a suburban area experiencing new development and growth in population. At the time of the study, the school was three years old and had enrolled almost 1600 students in a building designed for 1200 students. The school followed a multi-track, modified calendar to accommodate the large enrollment. Eighty-six percent the students were white, 9.5% were black, and almost 5% were Asian or Hispanic. The number of students eligible for free or reduced lunch was approximately 20% and there were no students eligible for

federal compensatory education programs. The students consistently scored well above the state and national average on achievement tests.

School 3, located in an urban area experiencing an economic decline, served 681 students at the time of the study. Of the total enrollment, 85% of the students were black, 14% were white, and 1% were Indian, Hispanic, or Asian. The students at the school usually performed poorly on achievement tests, scoring below the district and national averages. Eighty-seven percent of the students at the school were eligible for free or reduced lunch and 50% of the students were eligible for federal compensatory education programs. Due to the large numbers of students who were qualified for compensatory education programs the school was designated as a Chapter I school and received additional funds and equipment.

School 4, located in a transitional working class area of the community, enrolled 632 students at the time of the study. The student population had declined in the past years because of the age of the community and lack of new housing development in the area. The racial composition was 61% white, 23% black, 9.2% Hispanic, and 6.5% Asian. The district established a special program for students with limited English at the school and placed students from the surrounding areas at the school. Approximately one-fifth of the students who attended School 4 were in the special program. Almost half the students in the school qualified for free or reduced lunch and 27.5% of the students were eligible

for federal compensatory education programs. Students scored very close to the district and state averages on achievement tests.

Rationale

This study was designed as a qualitative analysis of the roles of the School Advisory Council in the interpretation and implementation of school improvement initiatives in four Duval County, Florida, schools. In order to describe the implementation of Florida school improvement initiatives, understanding the perspectives of the members of the SAC within the context of the local school was important. The interactions of the participants and their constructions of meaning provided reality to the policies and actions within the schools.

A review of scholarship on research methodology indicated qualitative approaches were appropriate when three conditions are present. First, the research was conducted in a naturalistic setting (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992; Marshall & Rossman, 1989; Merriam, 1988). Second, meaning and understanding of participant perspectives was of primary importance (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992; Marshall & Rossman, 1989). Third, inquiry was an interactive and inductive process between the researcher and the participants (Bogdan & Biklen; Marshall & Rossman, 1989; Merriam, 1988).

Clearly, when studying the context of school improvement and the participants' perceptions and understanding of their roles and responsibilities, the researcher did not have the opportunity to clearly identify variables prior to the

study and to manipulate potential causes to observe results. It was important to observe many variables within the system defined as the SAC. It was the description and explanation of the situations occurring that became important and could best be studied through qualitative case study methods (Merriam, 1988).

Design

This study was designed to allow flexibility while providing some logic and structure to what otherwise could be construed as undisciplined inquiry. Interviews, observations, and content analysis of written materials were the principal methods for gathering data. Utilizing a variety of investigative tools enabled the researcher to develop a clearer picture of "what was happening" in the implementation of school improvement initiatives.

The first phase of the research study was to identify commonalities and variability in the operations of the SACs in Duval County. During the spring of 1993 a questionnaire (Appendix A) was developed and sent to every SAC chairperson and principal of the 147 public schools in the Duval County school district. The questionnaire requested demographic information concerning the membership, willingness to act, and effectiveness of the SAC. From this initial information four SACs were chosen for more in-depth study.

The scope of this study was narrowed to four elementary schools in Duval County, Florida. The scope was based on several factors. The first factor was the influence of the local district on policy implementation. Numerous research

studies identified the impact of local or district factors on policy implementation as being important to consider (Anderson, et al, 1987; Fuhrman, 1988; Fullan, 1991; McLaughlin, 1982; Odden & Marsh; 1988). One county school district was selected to minimize the variables attributed to different districts' roles and abilities. Second, the researcher limited the study to elementary schools to minimize differences that might occur as a result of factors affecting parent participation at different grade levels. Third, four schools were selected to provide heterogeneity while maintaining a reasonable number of sites the researcher could comprehensively study.

Careful choice of SACs to study was important. Sites were selected based on access and the ability to maintain continuity by the researcher, a high probability that the researcher would observe variability in the people, processes, interactions, and structures that were part of the research questions, and the quality and credibility of the data were assured (Marshall & Rossman, 1989). Selection was based on the information provided by the respondents to the survey. Four SACs, which met the criteria listed above, were chosen for further investigation.

The second phase of the study consisted of gathering data from the identified schools for analysis. Literature on qualitative methodology suggested the use of content analysis as a useful method to analyze documents for a qualitative study (Merriam, 1988). Written documents such as minutes from meetings, by-laws, agendas, needs assessments, self-evaluations, and other written

materials were included for analysis. Quantification of the content analysis was accomplished through codification of material. Material obtained through observation and the minutes of SAC meetings were classified using the categories of pedagogical, administrative, curricular, or other that were developed by Easton in his evaluation of Chicago Local School Councils (Easton, 1991). Categories for other materials were developed by reviewing recurring themes and patterns within the data (Marshall & Rossman, 1989; Merriam, 1988). This systematic and analytical method was useful in the identification and development of categories that would require additional investigation and explanation. Content analysis of the written data provided information on how members of the SAC defined their roles, responsibilities, values, and priorities and raised topics of interest to be explored during the interviews.

In addition, the researcher attended a minimum of three meetings of each SAC and conducted in-depth interviews with the chairperson of the SAC, the principal, and at least one other team member. The purposes of the observations and interviews were to gather information and to verify information obtained through the written documents.

Observations were conducted with the participants' knowledge and comprehensive field notes were maintained for reference and credibility. Merriam's (1988) checklist of elements needed for comprehensive observations guided the observations of the SAC meetings (p. 90). These elements included

attention to the setting, participants, activities and interactions, and frequency and duration of situations.

The researcher interviewed a minimum of three people involved with each of the SACs in the study. The principal and chairperson of the SAC were selected along with one other member to provide a greater opportunity for explanation, understanding and triangulation. Taped interviews were conducted one-on-one, ranged from 20 to 45 minutes, and averaged approximately 30 minutes each. The purpose of the interview was, "to find out those things which we can not directly observe" (Patton, 1980, p.196). The interview allowed the participant to express feelings, expectations, and experiences that enriched the understanding of the researcher. Rather than predetermining specific interview questions, an interview guide (Appendix B) was developed to allow for the flexibility of exploring emerging ideas while assuring general areas were covered by all respondents.

"Data analysis is the process of bringing order, structure and meaning to the mass of collected data" (Marshall & Rossman, 1989, p.12). The strategies used by the researcher to bring order and meaning consisted of developing categories, coding all of the material obtained from written documents, interviews and observations, testing emerging hypotheses against the data, and searching for explanations and interpretations. Specific organizational techniques listed in Bogdan and Biklen (1991) were useful in managing, coding, and indexing data for easy reference. Frequent review of the data and continual reflection assisted the

researcher to develop meaning and understanding into the perceptions of the participants of the study.

After the information was gathered and analyzed, it was synthesized to determine how the local school, through its SAC, interpreted policy as it related not only to intent, but to activities. Questions that were considered in the study included the following: How and under what circumstances the school accountability legislation Blueprint 2000 was being implemented at the local level? What were the understandings by those who were at the school level? How did members of the SAC define their roles in school improvement? How did SAC members interpret the policies of school improvement? What were the responsibilities for policy implementation that were being accepted by the SAC?

Limitations

Several limitations are noted in the study. First, the study was limited to schools in one school district. Because of the importance of the local context to the implementation of policy the study was limited to one school district. This choice reduced the number and variety of external variables that could affect the study. The SACs included in the study would be operating under the same guidelines and regulations, thus allowing the researcher to describe what roles and responsibilities were being accepted by the members of the SACs. Including additional school districts in the study would have expanded the scope of the study

second year of operation. Change occurs slowly and more than two years will be needed to fully assess the responsibilities the SAC is assuming in fostering school improvement.

Summary

The research study was designed to adhere to standards of coherence, insight, instrumental utility, and consensus (Eisner, 1991). The researcher attempted to carefully adhere to these standards and to be guided by the emerging data and participants' comments and perceptions throughout the investigation. It was important to view the SAC from the members' perspective to convey not only the obvious, but the subtleties that would enhance the study. Special attention was given to any information which seemed contradictory or challenged the emerging categories. Attention to detail, corroboration and triangulation of information was utilized to insure coherence. The intent of the study was to provide a quality and comprehensive examination of the SAC in action as it interpreted and implemented state policy.

In summary, the researcher chose a four site case study. Data were gathered through interviews, observations of SAC meetings, and analysis of written materials. As new questions emerged throughout the study that the researcher felt were important to understanding the SAC, they were incorporated into the research. The findings of the study and conclusions will be reported in the following chapters.

CHAPTER 4

REPORT OF THE FINDINGS

This chapter describes the findings from the study of four SACs in Duval County, Florida. The purpose of the study was to investigate the implementation of the Florida school improvement initiatives and describe how the members of the SAC were defining their roles and accepting responsibility for implementing change in the schools. First, the data obtained through a survey distributed to the principals and chairpersons of the schools will be reported and analyzed. Then findings derived from an analysis of school improvement plans, minutes and observations of SAC meetings, and interviews with SAC members will be summarized.

Survey

The first phase of the study was to identify SACs for investigation that reflected the diversity of schools in the district. A questionnaire was sent to the principal and the chairperson of the SAC in 147 schools in Duval County. A total of 183 surveys were returned that represented at least one response from 125 or 85% of the schools surveyed.

The results of the survey of the principals and chairpersons are presented in Table 1. The number of members on the SACs ranged from a minimum of seven to as many as 50 members. However, the mean size of the SACs was about 20 members. The membership of the SAC was divided into four categories: business or community members, parent members, teachers, and others. Members reported in the others category frequently included school staff such as custodians, teacher assistants, school clerks, and school or district administrators.

The School Advisory Council Handbook, approved by the district School Board, provided guidelines for membership of the SAC. The guidelines recommended that at least one-half of the membership should be non-staff and the members should be representative of the racial, ethnic, and economic community served by the school (p.5). The total number of members on each SAC could be determined by the SAC when they wrote their by-laws. Schools varied, yet 97 of the SACs who reported had membership of 11 to 25 individuals and on the average maintained the recommended proportion of staff to non-staff members. Each of the SACs studied had members who reflected the diversity of student population of the school, however the membership was not proportional to the racial composition of the schools. Principals ensured that members of the SAC who were school staff reflected the racial composition of the school staff. The greatest variability in membership occurred in the area of business members. One school,

TABLE 1

School Advisory Council Survey Results

	Principals N=113	Chairpersons N=69	Summary of Statistics
Mean size of SAC	19.74		
Range	7-50		
Mean number of business members	3.79		
Mean number of parent members	7.29		
Mean number of teachers	5.84		
Mean number of others	2.80		
Willingness to act	4.31	4.39	4.34
SD	0.69	0.77	0.72
Overall effectiveness	3.99	4.12	4.04
SD	0.76	0.74	0.75

reporting a membership of 46 members, included all of its business partners on the SAC. In contrast, several schools listed no business partners on their SAC.

The survey was taken during the spring of 1993. Each principal and chairperson rated the effectiveness and willingness to act of their SAC on a scale of 1 to 5, with 5 being the highest. All of the respondents rated the SAC above average. The SAC chairpersons consistently rated the SAC higher than the principals with a mean rating of 4.39 on willingness to act and 4.12 on overall effectiveness. Principals gave the SAC a mean rating of 4.31 on willingness to act and 3.99 on overall effectiveness.

The criteria for selection of participants in the study included the following: elementary schools, where both the principal and chair responded to the survey, and indicated both a high willingness for action and overall effectiveness. From the group of schools that met the criteria, four schools were chosen that reflected the variability of schools in the district. The researcher chose schools of different enrollments, racial and ethnic balances, and economic status where the SAC was active. The schools reflected the district as a whole, but the researcher does not claim that the observations and findings can be generalized to the system as a whole. The researcher expected the findings from the four schools would illustrate the distinctive ways different SACs operated. A brief description of the elementary schools that were chosen for study follows.

Located in an affluent suburban section of the city, School 1 was overcrowded with an enrollment of over 1500 students. The school building, one of the oldest in the district, had been remodeled several times to accommodate the continual growth of the student population in the area. Surrounded by residential developments and a natural area of protected wetlands, the school grounds could not accommodate additional buildings. The students at the school performed well on national achievement tests, scoring well above the district average. The school had an excellent reputation in the community and residents frequently mentioned the reputation and test scores as a reason they moved into the community. Parents actively supported activities in the school and the community assisted in developing the wetland area into a nature preserve for the school and community to use.

At the time of the study, School 2 was three years old and already overcrowded with approximately 1600 students enrolled. The school followed a multi-track, modified calendar to accommodate the enrollment. The school received local, state and national awards for excellence, and the students consistently scored well above the state and national averages in achievement. Displays of the awards and recognition were prominent throughout the school. Parents and staff mentioned satisfaction with the school and at SAC meetings expressed concern about the effect of the large and growing enrollment.

School 3, a small school located in an urban area, had an enrollment of 681 at the time of the study. The neighborhood, once a thriving area of small businesses and middle income families, had declined over the years. Due to the low economic status of the community, over 80% of the students qualified for free or reduced lunch. Several years ago, the school district had considered closing the school because of low enrollment and the poor condition of the school building, but the community resisted. The School Board channelled funds to renovate the school completely and build a new media center. The school has remained clean and graffiti free since the renovation. According to the principal, parent involvement increased, staff turnover declined, and student behavior improved. At the time of the study, raising student achievement scores became a major goal of the school as students scored below the state and district averages.

Located in a transitional working class area of the community, School 4, a small school of approximately 600 students, enrolled children from the surrounding neighborhood and housed a special program for students with limited English. The diversity of students resulted in a unique ethnic and cultural environment at the school. According to the principal, students from 22 different countries attended the school and accounted for approximately one-fifth of the total enrollment. The school staff used the rich cultural mix of the school to enhance the curriculum. The PTA purchased a flag for every student's home country and displayed them in the cafeteria. Maps, cultural fairs, and special

programs highlighting different holidays and cultural traditions were planned by the staff and community to augment the standard curriculum.

Membership and Meetings

Table 2 displays the characteristics of membership of each SAC for the four schools as reported during the spring of 1993 when the study began. The four SACs represented a range of membership from 12 members at School 4 to 46 members at School 2. All of the SACs, except the SAC at School 3, had more non-staff than staff members, as recommended by the district guidelines.

Many SAC members interviewed expressed confusion over the intent of the rules regarding membership. All of the SACs had by-laws that defined membership. The by-laws clearly specified the total number of members allowed and how many could serve from each category. The by-laws of the SACs at Schools 1 and 3 limited membership to 20 members and specified the number of people who would represent parents, teachers, community members, and business partners. Schools 2 and 4 did not place a limit on membership but insured the recommended proportion of school staff to non-staff was maintained. School 2 limited the number of members from all of the categories except business partners.

Several SAC members interviewed distinguished between official membership and working membership. Official membership was represented in the list the SAC sent to the School Board for approval and working membership included anyone willing to work on the SAC. Members of the SAC frequently

TABLE 2:

Characteristics of the School Advisory Councils at Four Schools

	School 1		School 2		School 3		School 4	
Size of SAC	19		46		21		12	
Average Attendance	15	79%	27	59%	14	66%	7	58%
Number of business members	3	16%	20	43%	3	14%	0	0
Number of parent members	7	37%	13	28%	4	19%	3	25%
Number of Teachers	4	21%	3	7%	12	57%	4	33%
Number of Others	5	26%	10	22%	2	10%	5	42%

encouraged others to participate. At one SAC meeting, three people attended as visitors. At the next meeting two of the three sat at the table as new members.

Principals and chairs regarded as important maintaining a cohesive group of committed SAC members from the school who were willing to work. When the schools first developed their SACs, no guidelines existed on how to recruit members. Most members either volunteered or were recruited by the principal. Principals often asked for volunteers. One principal explained the process as, "We advertised in the PTA newsletter and said if you are interested contact the school. Basically what we have done is say, `Are you interested? Fine, Join up.'"

After the schools had formed their SACs, the district established new guidelines that required the members to be elected by the groups they represented. This requirement caused much frustration as SACs struggled to comply with the requirement. The principal at School 1 summed up the frustration, "We're not going to tell people they can't be on our SAC group now because we've done this in the springtime and they just came up with this [August]. We've been meeting and so I'm sorry we are not going to do that." The result was creative compliance. The school asked the PTA and the teachers to approve of the representatives already in place.

Another principal who did not hold an election stated, "Quite candidly, it wound up being a case almost of those who were willing to volunteer, and so that was tantamount to election. We didn't hold a formal election of balloting among

opposing candidates because there were just not enough people willing to participate."

The by-laws of the SAC at School 2 clearly specified that all business partners were members of the SAC. When asked about the rule to have community members elect representatives one SAC member responded, "Don't mess with success." He continued to explain, "We don't follow the rules to begin with . . . it's my understanding that a lot of what we do is kind of unique, cause we don't follow the letter of the blueprint."

On the average, SACs conducted meetings every month during the school year. When there was a specific task to be accomplished, such as developing a School Improvement Plan (SIP), many SACs met more frequently until the task was completed. Schools where the SAC was involved in some type of community project or issue also tended to meet more frequently. Developing and monitoring school improvement plans, discussing methods to alleviate overcrowding, and attending special school programs or events kept the SACs meeting during the time of the study.

The monthly meetings were considered official meetings and did not reflect the number of times the members of the SAC were involved in other school functions. For example, members of one SAC coordinated the landscaping of the school grounds over a period of several weekends. Another SAC organized community meetings to discuss the problem of overcrowding in the community.

Principals also reported members of the SAC frequently attended special programs within the schools to demonstrate their support and interest in the schools.

During the time of the study, the SACs in Schools 1 and 2 were actively involved in developing a recommendation, due in mid-January to the School Board, on alternatives to handle overcrowding. During this time, the SACs at Schools 1 and 2 met more frequently than the SACs in the other schools and they organized special community forums where experts from the community shared census data, housing development projections, and enrollment projections. As a result of the task, the SACs at schools 1 and 2 met seven times each from August to January, the SAC at School 3 met four times, and the SAC at School 3 only met three times.

Attendance at the meetings of the four SACs was very fluid. Average attendance at monthly meetings of the SACs ranged from 58% at School 4 to 79% at School 1. The SACs' methods of recording attendance and determining official membership were very inconsistent. Some SACs included all visitors in the attendance and others did not. At three of the SACs visitors signed in and were recorded in the minutes. In contrast, School 3 recorded visitors separately and listed each member in the minutes and indicated whether they were present or absent. School 3 had the only SAC of those studied that clearly differentiated between members and non-members. Special forums such as one held at School 1,

where approximately 187 people attended, were not included in attendance figures.

The differences in the categories of membership also caused unique attendance patterns. At School 2, the teacher and parent members of the SAC consistently attended the meeting. However, because of the large number of business partners considered members, many of whom did not attend on a regular basis, the average attendance was lower. The attendance at School 3 was consistently high and the same members attended each meeting. The chair attributed the high attendance to the commitment of the members, especially the teachers. At all four SACs the principal and the chair rarely missed a meeting. In 17 official meetings observed, only one principal and one chair missed one meeting each.

Each SAC included different guidelines in their by-laws for dealing with members who did not attend. In addition, all of the SACs incorporated provisions to dismiss members for non-attendance and replace them. The provisions varied from the chair simply appointing a new member after three absences at School 2, to requiring that the position be filled by the group represented at School 4. Vacancies were filled in two of the SACs studied. The emphasis of the SACs seemed to be on maintaining the working membership.

Another goal of the leaders in the SACs appeared to be to maintain a cohesive group of informed members while meeting the mandate that all SAC

meetings were open to the public. The chairs and principals stated they wanted as much input as possible from the parents, community, and teachers. "The SAC is the voice of the community," one chair said. Another principal used the term "representative democracy" when describing the SAC. SAC chairs and principals were trying to promote an atmosphere of friendliness and openness, yet maintain an orderly meeting where issues could be discussed and decisions made.

Content of SAC Meetings

Table 3 shows the variety of topics discussed by the SACs in the first and second year of operation. The data were recorded by the number of times a category of topics were discussed and the percentage of total times each category of topics were discussed. It does not reflect the amount of time devoted to each of the topics. For example, the announcements, attendance, and district reports could be very brief and a discussion of overcrowding may have lasted for 30 minutes.

SACs considered and discussed a wide range of topics at their meetings. Minutes from meetings the first school year indicated that the majority of topics dealt with administrative concerns. Topics included developing the by-laws, establishing operating procedures, announcements, and district reports. These topics accounted for almost 54% of the topics discussed during the first year of operation of the SACs, but declined to 49.5% of the total topics discussed by the second year. Also, the variety of topics increased the second year as SACs

Table 3

Topics of School Advisory Council Meetings

Topic Area	1992-1993		1993-1994	
	# of times topics discussed	% of all topics discussed	# of times topics discussed	% of all topics discussed
SAC Procedures:	65	53.7%	56	49.5%
Attendance				
District reports				
Announcements				
School Program:	47	39.0%	42	37.0%
Curriculum	10	8.2%	5	4.4%
SIP	25	20.6%	20	17.6%
Instructional organization	11	9.0%	15	13.2%
Administration	1	1.5%	1	1.7%
Finance and Budgeting	8	6.6%	5	4.4%
Personnel	0	0%	1	0.8%
Safety and Discipline	1	8%	4	3.5%
Community and Parent Involvement	0	0.0%	5	4.4%

became more concerned with issues surrounding personnel, finance and budgeting, school safety and discipline, and school programs.

The second most frequent topic of discussion was the area of school program. This area included school improvement plans, curriculum, school administration, and instructional organization, including the multi-track calendar and overcrowding. For both years the percentage of discussion in this area remained about the same; 39% for the first year and 37% in the second year. Within this area topics regarding the school improvement plan and overcrowding were the most frequent. One difference occurred as discussion of school organization relating to dealing with overcrowding became more prominent increasing from 9% to 13.2% and topics surrounding the school improvement plan decreased from 20.6% to 17.6% of the topics discussed. SACs at Schools 1 and 2 made recommendations to follow a multi-track, modified calendar for the 1993-94 school year and for the 1994-95 school year because of overcrowding.

Table 4 presents a breakdown of topics discussed in the SAC meetings by school in the topic areas of SAC procedures and school program. The areas of finance and budgeting, personnel, safety and discipline, and parent involvement represented such a small percentage of topics they were excluded from the table. This table shows that topics surrounding SAC procedures including attendance, district reports, and announcements occurred the most frequently in each of the

Table 4

Topics discussed at School Advisory Council meetings by school

	School 1				School 2				School 3				School 4			
	92-93		93-94		92-93		93-94		92-93		93-94		92-93		93-94	
SAC Procedures	31	64%	23	56%	10	43%	13	33%	13	46%	12	63%	11	46%	8	66%
Curriculum	3	6%	1	2%	1	4%	3	8%	3	11%	0	0%	3	13%	1	8%
SIP	8	17%	4	10%	5	22%	9	23%	7	25%	6	31%	4	17%	1	8%
Instructional Organization	6	12%	9	22%	3	13%	5	13%	2	7%	1	5%	0	0%	0	0%
Administration	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	1	4%	0	0%

SACs. Second, due to the mandate of the Legislature, the next most frequent topic discussed by members of each SAC was the School Improvement Plan (SIP). Finally, Table 4 also illustrates how the issue of instructional organization, including the concerns with overcrowding, became a prominent topic of discussion in Schools 1 and 2. Although the total percentage of the topics devoted to instructional organization did not appear large, the amount of time consumed by the discussions was great. Especially at Schools 1 and 2, members of the SACs spent considerable time during the fall and winter of 1993-94 discussing the issues involved with the alternatives to alleviate the overcrowding at the schools. The SACs at both schools held meetings where overcrowding was the only topic on the agenda.

A review of minutes of meetings, observations and interviews indicated that events occurring in the community frequently influenced the topics of discussion. For example, after the murder of a student on a school campus the number of discussions regarding safety rose dramatically. Until that event, student safety had not been discussed at SAC meetings. Also as population growth continued in the district, the superintendent asked the SACs for recommendations on how overcrowding should be handled at their school. At two of the schools in the study, this resulted in discussion and even special meetings devoted to the topic.

Many people participated in the discussions at SAC meetings. Interviews confirmed that people felt free to talk and share their opinions. One parent

commented it was her responsibility to give the perspective of the parents. "My role is to get views from the other parents then I will go to the SAC meetings and give them the feedback the other parents have given me." Teachers also said they felt comfortable participating. One teacher stated, "I feel free, I don't feel intimidated. I don't feel like my job is on the line if I don't agree with the principal." Principals reported they felt they tended to talk too much, but other members interviewed did not feel that way. The Chair especially expected the principal to exercise leadership and provide information to the group. As a result, principals talked more than other members.

School Improvement Plans

During the 1992-1993 school year the major responsibilities of each SAC were to establish their membership, adopt the by-laws, and write the School Improvement Plan (SIP) for submission to the district school board for approval. The district provided the SACs with guidelines for the development of the plan. The state required each school to generate school goals that addressed the seven state goals (Appendix C) listed in Blueprint 2000. However, they were not required to develop activities or strategies for all of the goals.

The state and district distributed to schools statistical information that included demographics, achievement test scores, retention rates, attendance figures for students and teachers, teacher qualifications and certification data, school awards, and the school budget. The SACs and school staff used the information to

determine the content of the improvement plans. Schools distributed this information to parents in an annual report and the SACs used this information and individual surveys sent to parents to determine the school's needs and to set the goals for the school.

Each school devised its own method for writing the school improvement plan that involved different levels of participation by the members of the SAC. In School 4, the school staff received suggestions from the SAC, wrote the plan and took it to the SAC for final approval. The chair of the SAC explained why they felt comfortable with that process. "The teachers should be making the plan because they are going to have to implement it." In School 3, members of the SAC along with a group of teachers spent a day away from the school and wrote the plan. In Schools 1 and 2, the SAC gave guidance to the school improvement team, comprised of school staff, who wrote the plan and then brought it back to the SAC for suggestions, revisions, and approval. The principal of School 2 explained, "The SAC was very much involved in the process all along, but the actual writing was done by the school improvement team." In interviews, members of the SACs at each school appeared to feel their method of developing the school improvement plan was the best for their school. Because of the flexibility afforded the schools, every plan looked different and placed emphasis on different goals and objectives.

Each school improvement plan included all seven of the state goals (Appendix C). However, the four schools in the study focused the greatest

attention on State Goal 3, the goal that addressed students' abilities to compete academically in the world and make well-reasoned decisions. Each plan included at least two school goals designed to improve student performance as well as strategies and activities to accomplish them.

The different needs of the schools resulted in some variability in the way the SACs addressed goal 3 in the plans. For example, students at Schools 1 and 2 consistently obtained high scores on measures of academic performance so the SACs chose to emphasize specific areas of science and technology. Specifically, the SACs targeted the acquisition of computers and science equipment to enhance the curriculum. The plan at School 2 also targeted high achieving and at-risk students and included improving the physical education facilities of the school. The SACs at both schools determined the emphasis after surveying the parents through school publications and discussion by the SAC. The strategies depended on either using current school funds to purchase equipment or raising support and funds from the community.

In contrast, the school goal on student performance for school 3 was "to improve student achievement in all academic areas," as stated in the 1992-93 School Improvement Plan. According to the chair of the SAC, the parents expressed their goals for the school as "we want discipline and we want reading, writing and arithmetic taught and we want our kids to excel at that. We don't want all that other stuff." The members of the school improvement plan writing team

reframed the goal and tried to use resources within the school to meet their goals. The school had excellent computer labs with an integrated learning system in place so the school staff developed schedules to provide all students with increased access to the labs and planned other activities in the school and classroom that recognized and encouraged academic achievement.

The school improvement plan at School 4 also focused on improving student performance through school resources. The school goal was to reduce the number of students who were retained in kindergarten and first grades. The plan listed strategies such as providing more volunteer tutors, identifying at-risk students for special help, and utilizing cross-grade tutoring. None of the strategies listed required additional funding. When asked about this the chair answered, "You make do with what you have. We are not a rich school. What we have are good teachers and some committed parents." It appeared the members of the SAC were realistic about their ability to provide additional resources and materials to the schools and selected the school goals accordingly.

The SAC members in Schools 1 and 2 assumed responsibility for locating and providing the resources necessary to achieve the goals in the school improvement plan. The members of the SACs were aware of the prohibition against the SAC acting as a fund raising organization, yet members of the SACs viewed one of their roles as providing resources to the school. One member of the SAC at School 2 stated succinctly, "You use your school advisory council and

business partners to do things for the school that the district doesn't do for the school." The SACs worked with business partners and the established organizations in the schools such as the Parent Teacher Association (PTA) or school boosters to provide funds or equipment that the school needed. The view of the SAC as resource provider was not uncommon and the members of the SAC did not see it as conflicting with the guidelines. One member indicated that the SAC and PTA were closely tied and the PTA would raise the money that the school needed. The members of the SAC felt it was the their job to make the school's needs known to groups and individuals who could help.

School 2 exemplified the close cooperation between the SAC, the PTA, and the business partners. The SAC at School 2 wanted to improve the physical education facilities for the students and established as one of the goals building a tennis backboard for the school. With the help of the school's business partners, the SAC undertook this task. From engineering expertise and earth moving equipment to concrete and labor, the backboard was designed, built, and painted with a minimum of school funds. A business partner on the SAC seemed very proud of this accomplishment. "We have pulled things [the tennis backboard] off here . . . that I don't think a school would ever have been in a position to attempt. It was a 100% in-house project."

All of the schools established goals that would require effort to accomplish. The principal of one school stated that the SAC was very careful to choose goals

that were achievable, but forced the staff to stretch. He felt it was important to set goals that required effort, but he also wanted to be able to show progress in the next year. Members of the SACs indicated they liked the fact that goals could be revised any time. One SAC member described the opportunity for revision as "a safety net."

During the time of the study, the SACs wrote the school improvement plan and then monitored the progress toward achievement of the goals. During the spring of 1994, each SAC provided the district with a progress report and could revise the goals if they chose. School improvement updates presented by members of the school staff at the regular meetings provided one means of monitoring progress toward meeting the goals. In these updates the staff member reviewed the objectives for a specific area with the SAC and provided information on the activities and strategies already completed. The SAC members rarely discussed the reports and seemed content with the progress.

Roles of the SAC

Members of the SAC perceived their roles in a variety of different ways. Some role definitions were based on the position the person held within the SAC. Other members defined their role as a collective member of the unit. Principals usually defined their roles from the individual perspective while parents, teachers and community members usually defined their roles more collectively.

Roles of the Principal

When asked about their role in the SAC the principals generally told what they did to make it work. They used terms like "leader," "facilitator," "catalyst," and "educator." All described their role as one of strong leadership to ensure smooth operation of the SAC. One principal strongly expressed the view that, "Members of SACs are very busy people whose role is to advise and not have to do the menial tasks" such as developing agendas or being responsible for distribution of minutes. The principal and staff at the school supported the SAC by completing much of the paperwork and administrative tasks for the SAC.

Each principal expressed concern about dominating the SAC. The principal of School 4 explained, "I try my best to sit back and let them take more of an active role. The hard part for me is to sit back and let them do that." The principals were aware of the need to maintain a balance between leadership and control. Another principal said, "You are not trying to exercise dictatorial control, but you must exercise some leadership to get the thing working smoothly."

The principal of School 2, in response to the question regarding her role in the SAC, stated clearly, "[Education] is [the principal's] thing. It is what we live every day." Another principal explained that, it was the principal who had the greatest overall knowledge of the school and often brought information to the SAC. It was difficult for the principal to sit back and let others assume an equally

strong role. Each principal expressed the wish that in the future the members of the SAC would be able to take on more leadership and the principal's role in the SAC would diminish.

Active SACs had strong leadership by the school principal. In the four SACs studied principals assumed major responsibilities within the SAC. They all were committed to doing what it took to make the SAC successful. One principal stated, "You, the principal, can not sit back and not be a part of it. Whatever happens in that SAC is a part of your school and it reflects on you. You have got to take a major leadership role." Principals contributed to the SAC by coordinating the logistics of the meetings and projects. Examples of the types of activities they provided the SAC were making sure the meeting room was properly arranged, preparing materials, contacting speakers, and preparing presentations.

The principal's expertise in educational matters was an important resource for the SAC. Each principal had been principal at the school for three to five years and had other administrative experience in the school district. Members of the SAC also recognized the importance of the principal to the success of the SAC. Each chair interviewed mentioned the value of the principal. Comments included, "Number one we've got the principal to pull it off," and "[name of principal] is the key person here."

In the meetings observed as a part of the study, principals and chairs shared the leadership role. The principal and the chair usually met or talked before the

meeting to develop the agenda and to plan the meeting. During the meetings the chair assumed the leadership role in conducting the meeting while the principal served as a resource for facts and information. Often this resulted in the principal talking more than others on the SAC, but this was not perceived as negative by other SAC members. SAC members seemed eager to learn more about the operation of the school and often asked the questions that required the principal to respond.

Collective Roles

The chairs and other members of the SAC tended to see both a collective and an individual role. They had identified a specific responsibility for themselves within the SAC and also had developed an identity for the whole group. When describing the role of the SAC, they used descriptors such as, "provide a voice for the community," "provide assistance and guidance to the administration," "giving our input on major decisions," and "telling the school administration, look, here are what our goals are." The members of the SAC clearly understood the legislative mandate of providing guidance and advice to the principal and developing goals for the school. Collectively as a SAC they were prepared to remain within the advisory role.

By law, SACs in Florida are strictly advisory and members apparently feel it should remain that way. One principal stated, "There needs to be a limit on anyone's decision-making authority." Another member feared, "They're not

elected, they're not paid a salary, they're not provided any number of what we call safeguards for accountability." SAC members' concerns about providing the SAC with more authority usually dealt with the fear of misuse or abuse of power and lack of knowledge to make good educational decisions.

Several SAC members described the need for balance, a larger perspective, and knowledge for SACs to be effective. One principal expressed concern that a SAC needs to be careful not to go making decisions that would affect other schools, "Someone must maintain the global perspective." For example, a change in curriculum, schedule, or calendar at one school could disrupt the programs offered at other schools or affect services provided by the district such as transportation. Families could have children attending different schools on totally different calendars. The cost of transportation to the district could be increased, taxing the resources available to all schools. The principal of one school thought that SACs should have limited areas of decision-making because of the interdependence between the schools and the district.

Confirmation of the local perspective of members and the potential for repercussions to the school district occurred in a SAC meeting where a change in the school's calendar was being discussed. The members of the SAC were considering dropping one of the tracks of the multi-track system. The principal reminded the group that the neighborhood middle school had the track they were considering dropping. Elimination of the track at their school would cause

problems for the middle school. One teacher member of the SAC said, "I'd rather worry about us. I don't care about [the name of the middle school]." The discussion that followed supported this view, and the SAC voted to eliminate the track.

Another concern expressed by members of the SAC was lack of knowledge to make good decisions. Both educators and parents on the SAC voiced this concern. "There is not enough time for laymen like us to show up at our once a month meetings and learn all there is to learn before we could make an intelligent observation about anything." At another school, the chair expressed the desire for, "More authority, in a thoughtful way. Cause there is a fine line between the power of the SAC and the power of the professionals." SAC members seemed to want to play an influential role in decision-making within the school but were concerned about their abilities in certain areas because of a lack of knowledge.

Knowledge about issues under consideration was an important determinant as to who assumed leadership in the SAC. Members were concerned about having the knowledge to make good decisions. Who was exercising leadership often depended on the topic of discussion. If the meeting centered on SAC procedures and administration, the chair played a major role. All of the chairs received some training from the district on the operation of the SAC and felt comfortable in the areas of organization and procedures. If the issue dealt with school academics then the teachers tended to play a larger role. In most of the schools, a team of

teachers wrote the school improvement plan with suggestions or direction from the SAC. If the issue under discussion concerned community perceptions or preferences, then the parents and business leaders tended to dominate the discussion. The principal was frequently consulted when the concerns were about the school administration, district policies, or school budget. Each group contributed when their perceived area of expertise was needed. At most meetings everyone participated in the discussion at one time or another.

Roles of the Business Partners

As individuals, the members of the SAC carved out a niche of responsibility for themselves. Business partners often viewed their responsibility as bringing a business perspective to education, a bottom line mentality, and a dose of reality. Several recognized their function as a resource for the school, but they were not unhappy to be in that position. One business partner explained this commitment as part of the "civic consciousness" of the business community. Many of the business partners had ties to the school through their own families or the children of employees and recognized they could provide additional support for their child's education.

The business partners also recognized the marketing and advertising benefits that participation in the SAC could provide. Special thanks to business partners appeared in school publications and the students made posters or drew pictures that were displayed in the business. However, one business partner

commented on the other benefits he derived from serving on the SAC. "I get a whole lot of enjoyment of knowing everybody's kids. One of the great joys of being a SAC member around here is showing up during school hours, go to lunch, have the SAC meeting, and walking down the hallway and have everybody know your name and you know their name because you know whose child it is."

Roles of the Parents

Several parents admitted they served on the SAC initially because they wanted to improve the school experience for their own children. As they became involved, they realized the importance of improving school for all children. In interviews, parents stated they felt the need to be a representative for the students and the parents in the community. At meetings parents made comments that indicated they were representing other parents. For example, in a discussion of school uniforms one parent said, " The parents I've talked to say it would save them money." This was true in all of the SACs studied and occurred during discussions of all topics. The parents seemed to accept the role of sounding out and giving voice to the parents' perspective.

SAC members tried to focus on what was best for all children while putting their personal complaints aside. Either the principal or the chair of each SAC gave a brief speech at a meeting early in the school year reminding members of the importance to consider the good of all children in their decisions. At the first meeting of the year, the chair of the SAC at School 1 stressed that these meetings

were not for parents to air personal grievances about the school or staff, but to discuss issues that were important to all of the children at the school. Other schools emphasized the needs of all children through their vision statements, mottos, and school improvement plans. During the length of the study those parents on the SAC seemed to maintain the perspective very well. Members of the SAC did not raise individual problems with the school or staff during the monthly meetings observed.

Individual complaints or problems may not have been brought up by members of the SACs, but personal interests definitely influenced decisions. For example, when members of the SAC at School 1 were voting on whether to drop one of the tracks of the multi-track system, the parent of a child on the track cast one of the few votes to maintain the track. Another example occurred at School 2. The members of the SAC discussed a plan to alleviate overcrowding at the school by capping the enrollment. Parents and business members were outspoken against any method that might have impacted negatively their ability to sell their homes or would have limited their children's chances of attending the school. Concern apparently shifted from the instructional program of the school to personal advantage and the economic welfare of the community.

Roles of the School Staff

School staff members on the SAC appeared to have the most difficult time in defining their roles. Friction with other staff at the school, personal views and

priorities, conflicting loyalties, and time demands made participation in the SAC challenging. Staff members who were part of the SAC appeared to be very comfortable in discussing issues at meeting and even expressing opinions different from the administration. Staff members of the school identified with the school in ways that sometimes placed them in conflict with the parents and other community members. Staff became defensive when others made negative comments about the school or staff. School staff quickly supported each other. Sometimes there seemed to be friction between the school staff and others on the SAC.

An example of an issue that placed school staff in an awkward position occurred at one school over the issue of overcrowding. The community and parents wanted to recommend the building of additional schools in the area to alleviate the problem. The principal shared information regarding a legal issue that would make building new schools unlikely. Many people were upset over what appeared to them as unfair. Everyone expressed an opinion. The principal defended the school system's position, and the parents spoke in opposition. The teachers and other school staff on the SAC remained remarkably quiet during the discussion. Later one staff member said that she felt torn between her personal views, her role as a SAC member, and employee of the school system, and, therefore, stayed out of the discussion.

Political Roles

Another role the SAC assumed was not expected. On several occasions the SAC assumed a political role within the school district. One member openly stated the SAC was, "a hell of a tool for the district." This statement referenced the role the SAC played in making an unpopular decision. The SAC made the recommendation to the School Board for the school to adopt a multi-track, modified calendar to handle the number of students projected to attend the school. Despite the SAC's involvement of the community through community meetings, forums, surveys, and written communication, the decision turned out to be very controversial within the school community. When a vocal group opposed the change and protested the decision, the School Board deferred to the recommendation of the SAC. A member of the SAC stated, "In my opinion, we were thrown to the wolves. It took the heat off of the district."

Conversely, another SAC looked to the district school board to accept responsibility for a difficult decision. One member said, "Let the district give us an out." At the time, the SAC was considering a decision that would be popular in the community, but might not serve the best interests of the district. If the School Board accepted their recommendations the SAC would be popular in the community, and if the School Board said no the SAC could still say they tried. Deliberations on this and other decisions reflected the members' comprehension of the political context surrounding their actions.

An article in the local newspaper described the political role of the SAC in a story on how the recommendations of the SACs on overcrowding would be used (Hennessy, 1994). The article stated the district Superintendent of Schools planned to use the recommendations made by the SACs in bargaining with the local branch of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) to allow new schools to be built. At the time of the study, the school district was under a federal court order that required agreement of both parties before changes could be made that affected the racial balance of schools. Since building new schools would affect the racial balances in district schools and require boundary changes, negotiation were taking place between the school district and the NAACP. The article implied the school system planned to use the recommendations of the SACs as a verification of the community members' preferences for new schools. Members of SACs indicated they were not especially surprised by the Superintendent's decision, although they had not been told of the intended use of their recommendations beforehand.

In another instance, the chair of the SAC at School 3 recognized the potential influence of the SAC in political issues. He supported his belief with an example of what he called "grassroots power." Several years ago, supporters of the school, by involving the media, had been able to shift school district funds to their school for major improvements of the school building and renovations. He described the SAC as "serving as a representative of those who might be afraid as

individuals to stick their necks out" and believed no one fully grasped the power of the SAC.

> We have learned that nobody down at the school board really knows what the power of the SAC is, and maybe nobody in Tallahassee does either. So if you go swinging out of a tree like a gorilla, beating your breasts you might get a lot of attention. We understand that and so everybody's got a view that there are real possibilities to do something.

This perceived power of the SAC resulting from the safety of anonymity, the power of numbers, and the newness of the concept to influence policy may be significant.

State and District Involvement

The members of the SAC seemed unconcerned with the activities of the state or district except when their actions created confusion, frustration or work for the SAC. SAC members agreed that the district and state were not always clear about the rules. The Chair of SAC 3 said, "It was frustrating because we kept hearing different things." Another SAC chair commented, "They are trying to provide us with information, but sometimes it's cloudy at best. I think they are trying hard to be helpful. I would probably rate them average to a low average." Another more optimistic SAC member thought the district had done a fairly good job.

Despite the lack of clarity, each SAC went ahead, focused on the issues of importance to the school, and gave little thought to the district or state. A principal summarized his feeling, "We are taking our own action, forging our own

path and we're saying this is what we are doing and this is what we see needs to be done and going on from there. Once everything clears and they give us some crystallized guidelines, then we will go ahead and make sure we are implementing them." The members of the SACs tolerated the lack of direction and seemed nonchalant about the lack of organization. One member said, "I can't really blame anybody. I think everybody's just feeling their way through it."

The SAC focused its attention to the local school. The members of the SAC were concerned with the issues and problems at their school and not as aware of what was happening with the district. One SAC member stated, "We are here to iron out our own problems." This concentration was especially evident as the members of one SAC worked through developing a recommendation to alleviate the overcrowding at their school. The chair epitomized the local school focus by stating, "We really have to make our recommendation, really almost in a vacuum. In other words we can't go out and try to obtain information from all of the other schools in Duval County to find out what they are doing because we really have no way of solving all of the issues and problems of the schools so we really have to do what we feel is right for the [local school] community." SAC members directed their attention to the local school issue. They did not look to the district for guidance or solutions.

When asked about the district's role, principals mentioned two issues: First, the training provided by the district to the principals and the chair of their SAC

and, second, the lack of clear communications. Before and during the time of the study, the district conducted several training sessions for members of the SAC and principals on the duties and responsibilities of members, problem solving, and group dynamics. Participant reviews of the training ranged from useful to overwhelming. One principal explained, "The information was valuable, but the process they were suggesting to us to get the SAC working together cooperatively would have been so time consuming it would have eaten up half the year. I'm afraid it would have disgruntled a lot of people." Members who attended generally described the training as helpful and said they could use some parts of it.

Members of the SAC indicated they would like more accurate information in a timely manner from the district and state. Also they were frustrated when the district changed policies that affected the SAC. One example of a change occurred over membership in the SAC, as described above. Originally, SACs were allowed to set their membership any way they chose. Then the district decided members needed to be elected by the representative groups.

Another example of the failure of the district to communicate with the SACs occurred in the writing of the school improvement plan. The directions from the district instructed schools to address all seven of the state goals and identify a minimum of two school goals to work on. The directions did not include any requirements as to format, length, or specific content. When one

school submitted their plan for review, district staff returned it with the comment, "it wasn't wordy enough." The principal explained the situation.

> Really it was kind of aggravating to put all that work into it, take it to the final review and have it thrown back at us by team of people who knew no more than we did and for them to tell us they didn't like it. We weren't getting any direction from you, but you're telling me you don't like it and you can't tell me why you don't like it other than it's not enough wordy for you? That kind of irritated us a bit.

Other schools had similar experiences with poor communication. When SAC members were asked to list what would make their SAC more effective, they frequently recommended improved communication and more information from the district.

In addition, The SAC members expressed confusion about the role of the state in the implementation of the policy. One chair was very negative toward the Florida Department of Education and expressed his feelings strongly, "It was the absolutely most inept [sic] public display of incompetency I've ever seen." He felt the state had sent a mixed message. In his opinion the state should have said, "By design we are not giving you guidance. We want you all to go out there and without any guidelines whatsoever, we want you to attack this your way." "Then," he continued, "at least that would have shown they had thought about it." In contrast, a member of another SAC thought the state was purposeful in leaving the SACs on their own and liked it. He said, "The guidelines are fine for a framework, but I certainly wouldn't want to be held accountable for a bunch of rules and

regulations. Which we really are not." Both members agreed that the State had been vague with their guidance but disagreed over the intention of the lack of direction and the impact on the SAC.

One principal shared his confusion over "who was calling the shots." He explained, "Getting SACs set up and our plan of action has been very difficult because it seems like they [the district] would come up with one thing and the Commission would come out with something, and the DOE would come up with something different and everybody was getting confused. I just hope in the future that everybody will get on the same page."

At the time the study ended, the members of the SACs appeared to be patient. They had set up their operating procedures and started to tackle school issues. They recognized that the rules may change, and appeared willing to work with the uncertainty. The principal at School 1 reflected this attitude in a discussion about the development of the school improvement plan. "We decided, let's see how this works. There is a lot going on here we don't understand. It is changing too much right now. Let's get going on this to begin with and then maybe we will change it. We want to kind of feel our way through this year." SACs were moving ahead making recommendations and being flexible as conditions and policy changed.

Attitudes

Members of the SACs included in the study believed their SACs were successful and were making a difference in the school. This finding was indicated by the high rating on effectiveness on the survey and confirmed during the interviews. Members attributed their success to a variety of reasons. "We have a group of people who are truly interested in the success of the school." "There is a lot of enthusiasm." "The parent involvement here at the school is phenomenal." "A supportive administration and committed, dedicated people who make up the SAC." "Our business partners." These comments by SAC members and principals represent a sample of reasons why members of the SAC believed their SAC was effective. The conditions surrounding success mentioned by the participants focused more on attitudes than concrete items. Assistance provided by the district or state and training, for example, were not mentioned by participants as factors contributing to their effectiveness.

Despite the enthusiasm and commitment by the current members of the SAC, members wished for more community and parental involvement in the school. In each school there appeared to be a core of parents, teachers, and community members who provided the leadership and support. The leaders of SAC were searching for ways to expand the community involvement in the school. One principal related the frustrations. "It is quite frankly very hard to get parent participation. We struggle with that on almost a daily basis. Now we have some

parents that are very actively involved, but they are a small minority." Another principal expressed concern that developing participation by large numbers of parents and community members may be very difficult. "It is very difficult to get them [parents and business partners] to give up their evenings or to come over for lunch. I think maybe the state is out of touch with reality when they think people are just going to fall all over themselves to leave their homes at nights and come up to the school to talk about education. It would be wonderful, but it is not reality." Each of the SACs spent time at meetings discussing ways to generate greater participation in the SAC and other school activities.

Several of the schools in the study reported instances of SAC meetings and programs where few people came. A public forum on overcrowding at School 2 attracted 50 participants, most of whom were members of the SAC and had organized the event. At another school a program attracted only the SAC chair, principal, PTA president, and speaker. Problems in attracting or maintaining participation in SAC and other school activities occurred even in schools where there was excellent participation on the SAC. Principals especially worked at recruiting members and planning activities that would encourage involvement.

All of the members who were interviewed agreed the SAC could improve schools. The differences occurred in their definitions of improve and what they saw as the areas of impact. One SAC member responded, "It depends on how you define improvement." Parents typically did not view success of the SAC only in

terms of improved student achievement, but in more abstract, subjective terms. Several mentioned more intangible and less measurable improvements such as student attitudes and satisfaction. One parent described the impact universally. "They [SACs] are going to make their area schools, which affect their children, a much better place to be, and in the end it will be a much more satisfying place, not only for their children, but also for themselves and for the community as a whole." Another parent brought the impact to the level of the student. "If you take the time to show someone you care, especially a child, sooner or later that child is going to start caring and want to make hisself [sic] better."

The teachers and principals who were SAC members tended to relate improvement to measurable objectives, especially in the administration of the school. One principal cited reductions in teacher turnover. Another principal cited the increased number of volunteers in the school and assistance in making some tough decisions for the school. Principals were less optimistic than parents on the potential of the SAC to promote change within the school. Principals still viewed themselves as the major decision maker in the schools. They were anxious about issues of accountability and doubtful about how much responsibility those outside of the school were willing to take. They also saw the process of parental involvement in school governance requiring a longer time to develop. When asked if the SAC can lead to school improvement one principal commented, "Yeah, I think it can. It's just going to be a long time." Principals also were worried that

the public and state officials might not give SACs the time necessary to develop. Principals appeared much more cognizant of the difficulties in implementing lasting change in a school. They were supportive of the process yet hesitant to predict success.

School staff viewed the impact of the SAC on school improvement from the perspective of how it affected their work life and day-to-day activities. Teachers who were members of the SAC were aware of the activities of the SAC, but did not believe that other teachers were conscious of changes attributed to the SAC. One teacher said, "I think on the whole the teachers don't realize how much it [the SAC] does." Another teacher reacted, "The faculty doesn't even know what was discussed. Even though minutes are kept, a copy of the minutes . . . is not put into every teacher's box so they can see, and that's probably something that needs to be done."

Even teachers who served on the SAC were less confident that the activities of the SAC would result in school improvement. "I probably can't say that [the SAC makes a difference in their school]. I think our's [school] is such a good school, it's hard to improve on." The teacher believed that the SAC made a difference in how the school was run, but could not provide examples of improvements attributed to the SAC. In the schools studied, staff thought the school was doing a good job educationally. The teachers viewed the role of the SAC as helping to solve school problems but they did not mention instructional or

curricular issues. Staff cited examples such as helping acquire computers, providing volunteers for tutoring, and representing the parent's perspective.

Parents believed SACs would make a difference in schools because they were mandated by law. Although the stated function of the SAC was advisory, parents felt SACs had more authority now that schools were required to have advisory councils. One chair referred to the new structure as "active rather than passive advisory committees." He made the distinction between sharing information under the previous guidelines and under the new law. Under the previous structure, information flowed from the administration to the parents and under the new law the information flows two ways. In his view the SAC should be involved in every aspect of the school and there should be an honest exchange of information. He summed up his explanation, "They have to listen to us now." Although the SACs were not given broad jurisdiction or authority, many members of the SACs felt empowered by the mandate.

Summary

During the time of the study, the four SACs operated as specified by the Legislature. They met, developed and monitored school improvement plans, and served as advisor to the school principal. While each of the SACs developed independently, certain features and characteristics were discovered that were common to all four.

In the area of the operation and organization of the SAC, similar structures and activities were discovered. First, in each SAC, membership was defined in a flexible manner with the purpose of assuring a core of dedicated members. Second, the SAC's level of activity and involvement in the school increased when there was a specific task to be completed. Third, the members of the SACs focused their attention on administrative and procedural topics relating to the operation and organization of the SAC more than other areas related to school improvement. Finally, despite the balance between educators and parents and community members, the educators, especially the principal, were an influential element within the SAC.

The roles and responsibilities assumed by the members of the SAC were varied and based on the needs of the schools and the resources and abilities of the members. The roles fluctuated as circumstances changed within the school community. Collectively, members of the SACs appeared comfortable with the role of advisor and did not desire more decision-making authority. The members were confident of the ability of the SAC to make a positive impact on school change under the current structure. However, they wanted the State and district to provide more clarity of the goals and procedures of the SAC. In addition, knowledge, through training and experience, was needed to increase the member's confidence and ability to make informed decisions.

Finally, the findings showed that the SAC had influence beyond just the local school. The decisions and recommendations of the SACs affected policy at the district level also. The political role assumed by the SAC and the members' desire for guidance from the State and district could result in the SAC influencing policy rather than simply implementing it.

The findings presented in this chapter illustrated how SACs in four Duval County elementary schools were operating at the time of the study. Each SAC defined their own role in school improvement within the parameters established by the State Legislature and the school district. The members' interpretations, and understandings of their roles and responsibilities and the activities of the SAC illustrated the unique function of the SAC in school improvement. Conclusions based on the finding and recommendations for future study and investigations will be presented in Chapter 5.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Chapters 1 and 2 presented an overview of the study and a review of the literature relevant to the study of school advisory committees and their role in implementing school improvement initiatives at the local school level. Research literature in the areas of parental involvement in schools, policy implementation, and theories of social construction and social systems was reviewed to provide a foundation for the current research.

The research setting and methodology of the study were presented in Chapter 3. A rationale for qualitative inquiry was provided and the design was explained. In addition, a brief description of the schools included in the study was provided to reinforce the importance of understanding the local context for the study.

Chapter 4 presented the findings of the study. Information from the questionnaires sent to school principals and SAC chairpersons, interviews, written materials, and observations of meetings were collated and analyzed to discover the roles of the SAC in the implementation of the Florida school improvement

initiatives. How the members of the SAC interpreted the policies and defined their roles were highlighted.

Chapter 5 offers discussion and conclusions based on the findings of the study reported in Chapter 4. Conclusions are presented by topic: the structure and authority of the SAC, perceptions of power, impact on change, local policy impact, and operations of the SAC. References from research literature are used where applicable to illustrate similar or divergent findings from the study. In conclusion, implications for the future of the SAC with recommendations are offered and suggestions for future inquiry are presented.

At the conclusion of the study, the SACs in Duval County had been operating under the rules and policies of the Florida school accountability legislation for almost two full years. Members of SACs were grappling with defining their roles and responsibilities under the new law. What areas of school improvement were the members of the SAC accepting? How did the members of the SAC define their roles? These were two of the important questions that warranted investigation. The perspectives and understandings of the participants were important to discovering how the members interpreted the policy and defined their roles.

Fullan and Stiegelbauer (1991) reminded educators that it is important to note the difference between how people actually experience change as distinct from how it might have been intended (p.4). The design of the study allowed the

researcher to spend time observing four SACs in operation and recount the experiences of the members to illustrate the struggles and decisions made during the implementation of school improvement initiatives. It was the process of interpretation and defining of roles and responsibilities, as well as the outcomes, that were important to understand.

The conclusions presented are based on data gathered during the study. Review of school improvement plans, by-laws, participant observation of meetings, and interviews with members of the SAC allowed the researcher the opportunity to develop a better understanding of what was happening in the SAC as the members struggled to implement the state and district policies. The conclusions are meant to be illustrative of what was happening and not intended to be generalized to the population of SACs as a whole.

Structure and Authority of the SAC

SACs in Florida have some, but not all, of the structural arrangements in place that research indicates are conducive to improvement of schools through parental involvement. Epstein (1991), Malen and Ogawa (1991), Moore (1992), and Swap (1990) have provided lists of important factors that should be present for school governance councils to be effective. The SACs included in the study contained many of the recommended elements. The SAC is a school-based unit; parents, community members, and school staff are a part of the organization; and members of the SAC have received training on their duties and responsibilities.

However, two other key conditions suggested by research were not present in the SACs studied. First, SACs are strictly advisory, and second, they do not have the power to displace the principal's or local school board's decision-making authority. The Florida Legislature intended for SACs to have limited authority and insured that by clarifying their responsibility as advisory bodies and allowing the district school boards to maintain their decision making power (Florida Statutes, Section 229.58 [1]). This places the SACs in the awkward position of trying to initiate change with only their ability to influence.

Even with this limitation, the SACs studied were active and making recommendations to principals and the School Board. The power of the SAC to influence may not be as direct as simply giving the SAC authority, but it can have the same result. S. Conley (1991) distinguished between authority and influence as two separate concepts of power that apply to school participative decision-making. Confusion between the concepts generates frustration among participants. It is important that principals, SAC members, and school board members recognize that the power of the SAC currently is based on influence. The SAC is not given direct authority to make any policy decisions. However, the ability to influence can be potent enough to result in change.

The members of the SAC recognized and used the inherent power found when individuals work cooperatively to catch and maintain the interests of elected officials. They believed the principal and school board wanted their suggestions

and would listen to what they said. School Board members attended SAC meetings and special forums and accepted the SACs' recommendations on several occasions, lending credence to the members' conviction.

At the time of the study, the members of the SACs appeared content with the amount of authority granted to them by Blueprint 2000 and were not seeking more. The members were comfortable with the role of advisor, despite the findings from Chicago (Moore, 1992) and Salt Lake City (Malen & Ogawa, 1988) that suggested school councils must have formal decision-making authority and broad jurisdiction to be effective. Members of the SACs studied accepted the limitations of their authority and generally did not express a need for more authority or jurisdiction.

Providing SACs with the greater authority as suggested by other researchers (Malen & Ogawa, 1988; Moore, 1992) may not be a realistic solution either. Even in school districts such as Salt Lake City where the school councils were given greater authority, the results did not indicate the councils were assuming a leadership role in instructional issues of school-improvement (Malen & Ogawa, 1988). And in Chicago, where site-based councils have extensive powers, some people believe the power of the councils should be curtailed (Hess & Easton, 1992).

SACs cannot operate without paying attention to the constraints placed by educational policy. If members of SACs are to make reasoned intelligent decisions

without oversight, they need to be very knowledgeable and informed of legal as well as educational issues. They must be aware of federal and state laws, local regulations, and school board policy. Without this knowledge SACs might make decisions that displace existing legalities. Either specific areas of authority should be outlined for the SAC or oversight by district school boards should be continued. The political context, legal issues, and external variables are complicated and will continue to be difficult for members of a SAC to handle without specific guidelines.

Perceptions of Power

Members of the SACs interviewed during this study believed they have the potential to influence policy at the school and within the school district. They had confidence that the legislative mandate requiring all schools to develop an advisory council empowered them and expected their advice to be accepted. Principals and members of SACs viewed the change from voluntary advisory committees to mandatory school councils with legislated duties as important in establishing the capacity of the SAC to affect change and improve schools. Events occurring during the study such as the recommendations on overcrowding and the building of the tennis backboard supported the views of the parents about the ability of the SAC to impact their school. As long as the ability to influence remains effective, the need for increased authority appears superfluous.

Through complex interactions between the individual members, the school culture, and social and political factors in the community, the SAC is assuming an identity of its own. As expected, based on previous research (D. Conley, 1993; Darling-Hammond, 1990; Fullan & Stiegelbauer, 1991; Murphy, 1991), the members of the SAC were defining their roles as a result of their perceptions, community events, and structures already in place. Past experiences in PTAs, volunteer activities, and business organizations influenced the roles members of SACs accepted. Some of the roles the SAC assumed were the community's voice, a resource provider, advisor to the school, and influencer of policy.

The roles are in the process of evolving, continually influencing the actions of the members, which affects the definitions of the roles. During the 1992-93 school year, the SAC at School 2 supported the School Board's decision to implement the multi-track calendar for their school. Participating in the decision established the precedent that recommendations for alleviating overcrowding would be an appropriate role for the SAC. During the 1993-94 school year, SACs in schools where overcrowding was a problem were expected to provide recommendations to the School Board. As the SAC assumed the responsibility in this area, individual members of the SAC attended School Board and City Council meetings to become informed and the SAC organized community forums and invited local government and school system officials to attend. Through action, members of the SAC expanded the definition of their roles. Others, both inside

and outside the SAC, observing these actions accepted the new definitions and extended their roles also. It became evident that the relationship between role definitions and actions was an evolutionary process that fits the social construction and social systems models. As a SAC took action in a new area, that action became part of a new role that was accepted and expected by members. Then these expectations led to new and different actions and the process continued evolving.

Through the complex interactions with others both within and outside the SAC, the members of the SAC are generating significant power to accomplish their objectives. The best description of this type of power comes from Dunlap and Goldman (1991), who referred to this form of influence as facilitative power. Facilitative power is working through others instead of exercising authority over them. In their relationships with the principal and school board, the members of SACs must work through them for decisions to be made. The SACs in this study networked with individuals and organizations, working through the existing political and bureaucratic structures, arranging resources to support schools, and monitoring activities in efforts to accomplish the goals they established. Convincing the School Board to divert funds to renovate School 3 and utilizing a community forum to support a recommendation on overcrowding at School 1 are examples of facilitative power. Currently, the role of the SAC and the extent of appropriate sphere of influence may be greater than anyone expected, given the

limitations on their authority. The perceptions of influence and power may be more potent than the actual authority given to the SAC by law.

Impact on Change

SACs are affecting what is happening and influencing change in schools. The SAC's participation in the development of the school improvement plans highlighted one area where parents and community members became aware of the status of the schools and participated in developing goals for improvement. Before the formation of SACs, parents had little involvement in a school other than volunteering or direct contact with their child's teachers. After the development of the SAC, the SACs assumed responsibility for making parents and community members aware of the needs of the schools and providing a public forum for monitoring schools' progress. Without the SAC it is doubtful School 2 would have built a tennis backboard or School 3 would be considering moving toward a policy of asking children to wear uniforms. SACs are making changes in schools and providing opportunities for parents to make choices about the education of their children.

SACs ask questions that require answers. D. Conley (1993) suggested, "The mediocrity tolerated by some school systems will be severely challenged if parents are spending more time in schools and participating in the education of their children" (p.215). As SACs begin to review teaching, administration, facilities, and other areas in the schools, they are not likely to tolerate the status

quo. Recognizing a problem is the first step to solving it. The existence of the SAC causes individuals associated with schools to look at information, identify areas needing improvement, and set goals toward that improvement. For many schools this is a change. For example, the SAC at School 4 identified the high retention rate for kindergarten and first grade students as a problem and took steps to reduce it. The SAC, with assistance from the school staff, decided to try alternative means to improve the achievement test scores of students. It is doubtful these efforts would have been attempted if the SAC had not been in place to assist in the identification of the concerns.

The changes that are occurring in schools because of the SAC are expected to be less dramatic than changes in Chicago or Kentucky where the powers and responsibilities of school councils and school boards are broader and more clearly specified. The scope of authority provided to these other school systems should enable change to occur more dramatically. The ability of the Chicago school councils to adopt budgets and select principals and the requirement that principals in Kentucky implement recommendations of school councils in specified areas provide additional power and increase the potential to make changes. In contrast the SACs studied are advisory bodies only and do not have the authority to make change without school board approval. The members of the SACs in the study used alternative forms of power to accomplish their objectives. Thus, change in

the schools where SACs are involved may be less dramatic, but possibly equally as lasting and positive due to the use of facilitative power and political influence.

It is too soon to assess whether the SAC can affect student achievement positively. At the time of the study SACs in Florida had barely one year to implement school improvement plans. SACs will be conducting their first assessment of progress toward school goals during the spring of 1994. Students will be taking achievement tests at the end of the 1993-94 school year that will provide the first glimpse of the changes that may have occurred in student performance on achievement tests. Fullan and Stiegelbauer (1991) stated that institutional change may require five or more years. Patience will be required in Florida and elsewhere. Other studies have similar findings to those of this study. Chicago began their reform effort in 1988 and Moore (1992) stated, "It will be several years before evidence from the Chicago experience will begin to indicate whether the Chicago strategy is improving the quality of students' educational experiences and the performance of Chicago's students" (p. 146). In Kentucky, the Educational Reform Act was passed in 1990 and according to Steffy (1993) it will be 1994 before comparative data will be available to evaluate the relationship between school councils and student achievement. In Florida, as elsewhere, continual monitoring of the school councils and their impact on student achievement will be essential.

Local Policy Implications

The SAC has a much wider sphere of influence than may have been intended. The legislation that created the SACs stated the intent as, "returning the responsibility for education to those closest to the students, that is the schools, teachers, and parents" (Florida Statutes, Section 229.591 [1]). The Florida Education Commission on Reform and Accountability in the publication Blueprint 2000 reinforced the local control of decision-making in the mission and belief statement as, "The state will no longer dictate process or program to local schools and districts . . . " and "A decentralized system gives schools and districts greater freedom to design programs that meet the needs of individual children" (p.i). It is clear each SAC is intended to function at the local school level making decisions and recommendations for the purpose of improving one school.

Despite the intent of the Legislature, this study found the SAC has become a player in the arena of district, and potentially state, educational policy. As noted in Chapter Four, when members of SACs at Schools 1 and 2 made their recommendations to alleviate overcrowding at their schools, they did not anticipate the potential political ramifications of their decisions. Also, parents and community members at School 3 demonstrated the political nature of community councils when they convinced the School Board to divert funds away from other projects to renovate their school. Clearly, in these examples the SAC was a player

in making or changing district policy. Despite the limited legal authority, the SACs demonstrated a de facto political power that made them influential in a political arena that had not been anticipated.

Members of the SACs quickly accepted the premise of local control and only infrequently acknowledged the connections between the SAC, other schools, and the district. Comments from SAC members suggesting decisions would be made "as if in a vacuum" or "doing what is best for our school" illustrated the recognition and acceptance of the local orientation for decision-making. However, some members of the SACs realized the extent of impact for the SAC. The members of SACs reach a crucial point in the definition of their roles and responsibilities when they come to the realization that their decisions have greater impact than just at the local school. The members may choose to accept the expanded role and responsibility or become overwhelmed and lose the desire to tackle the task. At the time of the study, the members who reached this turning point responded with enthusiasm and optimism. The recognition that no decision is entirely local or site-based is crucial to the future development of the SAC.

The SAC has an impact beyond the local school. Decisions members of SACs make regarding local school issues are being incorporated into regional concerns and district School Board decisions. During the period of the study there were several instances to support this conclusion. For example, the recommendations made by Schools 1 and 2 to cap enrollment and eliminate one

track of the multi-track organization impacted both nearby schools and district support services. If the recommendations are accepted by the School Board, some students will need to be transported to other schools, increasing costs for transportation, overburdening other already crowded schools, and inconveniencing parents and students. Schools are not isolated from others in a district. They are connected because of geography, families, and district support services. In addition, legal and financial issues must be considered. Schools may prefer to operate within a vacuum, but that is hardly realistic or possible in this age and environment.

The enlarged sphere of influence and de facto political power of the SAC contribute to a complex relationship between the SAC and school district. Examples of the intricate relationship occurred during the study as both the district and SAC attempted to avoid blame and transfer responsibility for unpopular decisions to alleviate overcrowding. The district and SAC recognized the usefulness of the other as an additional layer of authority. The game of "buck passing" and "blame throwing" became a practical tool for both the district and the SAC. Members of two SACs realized they could make a recommendation knowing the district would never support them. This allowed these SACs to show support for their constituents' wishes and blame the district for failure to adopt their recommendation. Also the SAC could choose not to act or "pass the buck" and be confident that the district would step in to make the decision. At School 1,

when the SAC members did not want to tell the parents that building new schools was not an option, they decided to invite the Superintendent to a public forum to answer the questions. One SAC member said, "Let him [Superintendent] tell them no new schools."

The district also recognized the value of the SAC in the tricky game of politics and deferred decisions, or "passed the buck," down to the SAC. In the controversy over the multi-track calendar at School 2, during the spring of 1993, the School Board side-stepped accepting the blame for the decision by saying it was the school SAC's recommendation to follow the multi-track calendar. Also, the school district plans to use the SACs' suggestions to alleviate overcrowding in negotiations with the NAACP. During the study SACs and the district were striving to strengthen their positions in the community through some intricate political maneuvering. The potential of this unique political tool to impact school governance and reform may be great.

In order for the SAC to make improvements in the education of children at the local school level, changes will need to be made throughout the school system. Hill and Bonan (1991) reached a similar conclusion in their study of five school systems utilizing site-based decision models. They concluded that site-based management is really a reform of the entire school system. Also, Fullan and Stiegelbauer (1991) recognized the importance of the role of the district in supporting change in schools. From observation and analysis of the four sites

studied, it is evident that the SAC through its operation and growth should encourage change to occur throughout the system. Although the current method for policy making still comes from the state to the district to the school, it appears the impact of the SAC will be to weaken this pattern. Greater decentralization and greater independence for schools will be the result if SACs continue to make an impact on school improvement.

Operation of SACs

The SACs observed were more concerned with meeting the spirit of the law than the letter of the law. Whether membership rules or requirements to monitor the school improvement plan, the SACs were more concerned with actively participating and providing assistance to improve the schools than with submitting paperwork to the district or adhering to regulations. Membership rosters were sent to the district school board for approval, yet in reality membership consisted of individuals who came to the meetings and showed a willingness and interest in participating. SAC members assisted with fund raising activities or provided resources to the school despite the prohibition against fund raising. Mid-year reports were submitted to the district after cursory reviews by the SACs. In the SACs studied, members of the SACs trusted the school administration and depended on the principal to insure the proper paperwork was completed on time. Rules of order, attention to protocol, and attention to district rules were not

emphasized. However at meetings, members showed interest in events at the school and discussed plans to improve the school for all students.

The informal organization affords the SAC freedom from constant oversight. If the SAC were more rigidly defined and granted broader jurisdiction and greater power, then, presumably, the SAC would be held to greater accountability. Currently, the members of the SAC enjoy the freedom provided by the lack of structure and are not seeking to change it.

Schools where the SACs had concrete tasks to perform had more active and involved membership. Those SACs without an immediate issue to be handled or an obvious problem to be corrected met less frequently and had more difficulty in defining their function within the school. In Schools 1 and 2, the task of developing recommendations to alleviate overcrowding at their schools kept them active. The members discussed the pros and cons of alternatives and actively solicited the views of the parents and community. The SACs in these schools played a leadership role in educating the community to the issues, getting community opinions, and recommending policy. The activity allowed members to participate in discussions of substance, develop a group identity, practice leadership skills, and define their roles and responsibilities within the scope of the SAC.

At schools 3 and 4, where there were no pressing issues, the SACs met less frequently and evolved much more slowly. The main responsibility for the SACs

in the year of the study was to monitor the progress toward meeting the school goals identified in the school improvement plan. This was accomplished through regularly scheduled monthly meetings. There was no sense of urgency, the meetings were informal with little discussion, and no new initiatives planned. The members had less opportunity to explore the different roles and functions of the SAC and as a result had not developed an identity as clearly defined as the SACs in Schools 1 and 2.

The presence of an issue or concrete task is more closely related to the amount of activity of the SAC than the commitment or skills of the individual members. An incident at School 3 illustrates how a problem can encourage unity and activity. Prior to the inception of SACs, parents and teachers at School 3 formed a group to improve the physical plant of the school. One community member explained, "The school building itself was in absolutely atrocious condition and ugly. You'd walk in the front door and it was bedlam." The group took an active role, petitioned the School Board and generated public interest through the media. As a result, the school was completely renovated and a new administration appointed. The parents who took action are the core of the current SAC and have demonstrated a willingness to take action. However, this school year they have met less than once a month and are allowing the school administration to take the lead in evaluating the school goals. The members are committed to improvement but need a challenge to become active.

Members of SACs focus more on structural and administrative issues than instructional programs. Minutes and observations of SAC meetings revealed that discussions of administrative topics dominated the SAC meetings. Attendance, amendments to the by-laws, announcements, and meeting dates and times were topics discussed at almost every meeting. These topics consistently accounted for nearly 50% of all topics discussed at SAC meetings. Based on similar information from Chicago where administrative concerns represented 32% of topics discussed (Easton, 1991) and Kentucky where the first year of council meetings dealt with the "nuts and bolts" (Steffy, 1993), the percentage of topics devoted to administrative issues by SACs was not surprising.

In addition to administrative issues, the SACs addressed other matters that did not relate directly to instruction. During the study, SACs in the four schools were responsible for building a tennis backboard, purchasing computers and science equipment, discussing school attire, and planning enrichment programs. D. Conley (1993) suggested it may take two to three years for members of school governance councils to redefine their roles and focus their energies on instructional issues. It may take several years before SACs become influential in making decisions about instructional programs in the school. The four SACs studied are still within this period and should be allowed more time to develop before their success is evaluated.

Roles of the SAC

At the time of the study members of the SACs were in the process of defining their roles. The process was not complete, but evolving with each new task the members of the SAC tackled or new issue they discussed. Murphy (1991) considered the redefinition of roles and responsibilities as one of the key factors necessary for change to occur in schools. D. Conley (1993) carried the idea one step further and stated that the redefinition of roles was one of the most difficult tasks. It requires not only those in the SAC to identify, define, and adjust to their new roles, but also for those outside the SAC to adjust also. The SACs in the study illustrated these views.

The roles closest to the traditional roles parents, principals, teachers have played in the past are the ones the members of the SAC most easily accepted. First, parents accepted the role as advisors. They viewed their responsibilities as informing the principal of the parents' wishes and preferences, endorsing decisions, and supporting the school staff. Being on the SAC provided them with an avenue to be better informed of events in the school. At the time of the study, parents were playing these more traditional roles the majority of the time, but were beginning to accept responsibility for tasks not traditionally assigned to parents. In School 1, a parent assumed leadership of the overcrowding sub-committee. Her responsibilities involved planning, conducting, and presenting the results of the survey in a community meeting. School staff offered support but were not actively

involved in the project. As parents accepted responsibilities within the SAC, they began to recognize the potential to alter traditional patterns of power within the school. As parents test the existing boundaries of control, the result may be new, unique relationships between parents and school staff in the governance of the school.

Second, principals exercised leadership and control in the SACs. They expressed a willingness to allow the SAC more responsibility, yet hesitated to release control. Principals interviewed in the study expressed concern that the SAC members did not have the in-depth knowledge of the school and district procedures to make informed decisions concerning areas such as budget and personnel. They also cited restrictions placed on the schools by unions, and district policies and state regulations. Principals may hesitate to release authority when they are still held accountable. The challenge will be to develop the competencies of the members of the SAC, build trust between the SAC and school, and amend state and district policies for the principal to more easily release control and assume a different role in school governance.

The principals of the schools in the study were all enthusiastic about the potential of the SAC and working on redefining their roles. At the meetings observed, they were willing to share information with the members of the SAC, listen to their concerns and advice, and were more facilitative than directive, attempting to guide rather than direct. The principal's attitude appeared to play a

major role in the ability of the SAC to impact decisions regarding school policies and activities.

Third, teachers on the SACs usually followed the principals' lead. Seldom did teachers move into a role of challenging or disagreeing with the principal or parents. Teachers interviewed stated they felt the freedom to share their opinions and disagree with the principal, but there were no instances observed where disagreement occurred. During SAC meetings teachers became the most involved in discussions about class sizes, or school schedules. Usually their role was to provide information or present the teacher's perspective. More frequently the principals and teachers presented a unified front to the SAC. Decisions of consequence were discussed in school faculty meetings or with the school improvement team and the position taken at the SAC appeared united.

Parent involvement in site-based decision making tends to be controlled by the educators. In the SACs studied, professional control of the SAC was evident in a number of different ways. First, the membership of the SACs was chosen by the principal. The requirement for election of membership came after most of the SACs already had their members. Usually, principals recruited members from the PTA or volunteers who served in the school. It is unlikely that principals recruited individuals to join the SAC who were known "troublemakers."

Second, the professional coalition consisting of the principal and the teachers influenced the topics discussed and the recommendations made by the

SAC. The principal was responsible for bringing to the SAC items to be discussed. Though chairs of the SACs often participated in setting the agenda for meetings, principals generally identified items to be included in the agenda. The chairs lacked an independent information system that would permit them to initiate topics for discussion. Also, teachers were responsible for developing the school improvement plan in three of the schools. In only one school in the study did the non-educator members of the SAC and the teachers actively collaborate on the development of the plan. The usual role of the SAC was to give advice to school staff about the overall goals and approve the final plan. Parents and community members deferred to the professional educators.

Third, staff members' opinions during discussions frequently swayed others. Comments from parents, such as "I don't think the [SAC] should be making the plan because the teachers have to implement it" and "[The principal] has the experience and the knowledge of the school," demonstrated the subtle influence of the educational professionals on the SAC.

The professional educators dominated the actions of the SAC although according to district guidelines at least 51% of the members of the SAC were non-staff. Teachers, principals and other school staff who participated on the SAC, either as official or unofficial members, exercised more influence than indicated by the percentage of membership. In interviews, parents indicated that the professional knowledge and skills of the school staff should be given additional

consideration. During meetings, parents often deferred to teachers or asked for their opinions. Since professional educators have greater access to information and the authority of the SAC is ambiguous, informal control of the SAC is held by the school staff on the SAC. Additional evidence to support the conclusion of professional domination of SACs can be found in recent studies of school councils. Hess and Easton (1992) confirmed that principals and teachers in Chicago participated in discussions more frequently than parents and Malen and Ogawa (1988) reported parents did not exercise significant influence on decisions.

During the study, there were glimpses of members beginning to redefine the traditional roles and responsibilities. One example was when parents and community members appeared before the School Board to present recommendations rather than relying on the principal to act as an intermediary. Other examples included teachers making presentations directly to the SAC and principals allowing others to preside over school meetings. Finally, the SAC as a collective body discussed and made recommendations on issues that previously would have been decided by principals or school boards alone. As discussed above the SACs began to expand their spheres of influence and began to assume a political identity in the educational system. Participation in this area caused several members to reflect on the potential of the SAC to influence policy beyond the local school and signs of role restructuring were beginning.

Summary of Conclusions

A summary of the conclusions from the study of four SACs are as follows:

1. SACs are evolving and are active making decisions that affect schools.

2. The actions of the SACs center around school organizational issues and overseeing the development and implementation of the school improvement plan.

3. SACs contain members who are dedicated, enthusiastic, and optimistic about their ability to influence policy to make a difference in schools.

4. SACs are influencing change in the schools.

5. The members of the SACs are less concerned with following specific rules and guidelines in their honest efforts to assist the schools improve.

6. The SACs are comfortable with the role of advisor, yet display an interest and willingness to assume a greater responsibility in school improvement.

7. The power of the SAC extends beyond the local school to influence policy . The SAC does not operate independently but is part of an intricate network within the community and school system.

8. Local factors affected the development of the SAC by creating challenges for the SAC and setting parameters for action. District policy, student population of the school, skills and abilities of individual members and the principal, and local political factors are resulting in different modes of operation and development of the SACs.

9. The perceptions of influence and power may more potent than the actual authority given to the SAC by law.

10. Members of SACs are beginning to expand their roles and alter traditional patterns of responsibility and influence in the schools.

Implications for the Future of the SAC

Drawing from the observations, interviews, and written materials, the SACs are fulfilling their basic responsibilities as outlined in the legislation. The SACs meet regularly, discuss relevant issues, and provide assistance to the principal as requested. They developed the school improvement plan and are currently monitoring the progress toward achieving the goals and objectives. There are frustrations and problems to be solved, but enthusiasm and optimistic attitudes prevail as the SAC is developing and assuming leadership in policy areas.

Although the SACs fulfill their basic responsibilities as outlined in the law, it became apparent that given the existing conditions and development of the SAC, changes would be required for SACs to flourish and fulfill their potential as change agents in education. Education needs to be everyone's responsibility not just the school's. D. Conley (1993) stressed the need to create "new habits of heart and mind" and listed as one assumption, "Parents, employers, community members have responsibilities for the education of the community's young, along with a right to be included as partners in important decisions about education" (p.49). During the study it became apparent that through the SACs, parents and

community members were provided the opportunity to participate in the education of the children of the community and were beginning to accept a share of the responsibility.

Several lessons can be learned from the study. First, patience will be required to enable to SACs to mature and play an effective role. As noted, research on educational change suggested that possibly five years is needed for effective change to take place. Kentucky and Chicago embarked on the journey of school-based governance from one to three years before Florida started and they are still in the process of evolving. Reformers should not fall into the "time trap" (D. Conley, 1993, p.316) and become discouraged too quickly or fail to provide the time teachers, parents, or others need to redefine their roles. Time is required to be successful. Members of the SAC need time to develop their knowledge and skills before SACs are discarded as ineffective. This study illustrates where the four SACs are in their development and suggests that more time is needed before their success or failure is determined.

Second, to assist the members of the SACs to become knowledgeable and skilled in their responsibilities, training will need to be ongoing. The state and district have exhibited a willingness to provide training and technical assistance to the members of the SACs. All of the chairs of SACs and principals received training from the district on the duties, responsibilities, and basic operation of the SAC. Opportunities for training continue through the year on similar topics as

well as topics on teamwork, leadership, and group dynamics. Numerous studies have indicated the importance of technical assistance and training to the implementation of policy (Dentler, 1984; Marsh & Odden, 1991) or specifically to school reform (Fullan & Stiegelbauer, 1991). Both the district and the state have planned and conducted training, developed handbooks, and provided minimal funds to assist members of SACs to implement the initiatives. It has become clear from the study that additional training is needed to better prepare non-professional members to perform their duties and to build trust between the professionals and parents. Time and additional resources in the form of training will be required for all involved in reforming schools through the adoption of SACs.

Third, SACs represent a change in governance of schools that alters the relationships between parents, community leaders, individuals in the schools, and the district. The changing relationships make it difficult to tell who is responsible for success or failure of different aspects of schools. Clarification of roles and authority is needed to reduce frustration and enable the SAC to assume leadership and responsibility in the education of students. This is not to imply that SACs should be given greater decision-making authority, simply that the scope of their responsibilities should be clarified. Lessons from Chicago, Salt Lake City, and Kentucky should be used to find a balance between empowerment and accountability. Members are more likely to accept responsibility for decisions when they better understand the limits and possible consequences or rewards.

Currently the ambiguous language in the statutes makes it difficult for SACs to define the areas where they could have impact.

Ambiguity in the legislation allows for flexibility in the development of the SACs. Differences in school size, population of students, individual school needs, and local factors necessitate the need for flexibility. However, like the findings in other urban school districts (Malen, Ogawa, & Kranz, 1990), the study revealed the ability of the SACs to develop improvement plans is limited by district or state regulations, policies, and political pressure. There is a need to allow SACs flexibility while ensuring the members understand their duties and scope of authority. Currently, the Florida Department of Education is addressing one aspect of flexibility by providing a document to SACs that includes descriptions of all the statutes and rules that are eligible for waiver. The SAC can request a waiver of a current statute if the statute prevents implementation of a strategy to meet the identified needs of students listed in the school improvement plan. However, the existing procedure is cumbersome and requires approval of the local School Board and the Department of Education. None of the SACs in the study applied for or even considered applying for a waiver.

Flexibility, accountability, and clearly defined areas of action and authority are needed to encourage the growth and development of the SACs. SACs will require cultivation and time from the district and state if they are to develop into a viable instrument to impact school improvement in Florida.

Recommendations for Future Studies

Several limitations are noted and recommendations for future studies suggested. As a case study limited to four elementary schools in one county, the findings and conclusions are not expected to answer all of the questions raised about the role of the SAC and its ability to implement Florida school improvement initiatives. Several logical extensions to the study would provide important information to the field.

First, some questions regarding the role of the SAC in secondary schools require investigation. Because secondary schools operate with more legal oversight and limitations on curriculum, graduation requirements, attendance, and instructional organization, the role of the SAC would be expected to be different. In addition, at the secondary level, the parent's and community's expectations of their responsibilities as a member of a SAC may encourage them to pursue different goals and assume different roles.

Second, expanding the study to include more SACs would provide greater validation of findings and provide a larger sample to assist in the development of common themes. While the four schools chosen for inclusion in the case study are representative of the diversity of elementary schools in Duval County, the findings cannot be generalized to all SACs. Because of the importance of the local context to the development of roles and responsibilities, a comparison of SACs in different school districts may provide additional valuable information to the study.

Third, inclusion of the relationships of the SAC with area advisory councils and the district School Board would enhance the study by adding the dimension of power relationships in decision-making. If SACs are to become influential in the reform of schools, it will be interesting to follow the development of power relationships and the struggle that may ensue.

A fourth extension would be to conduct a longitudinal study to continue investigating the development of the SAC. Research suggests it may take several years before SACs begin to make decisions that affect instructional programs. Before final decisions are made on the effectiveness of the SAC to improve schools, information on student achievement is important. In addition, following the evolution of the SAC as members further define their roles and interpret policy could provide intriguing insights into the process and meaning of change and contribute to the knowledge of policy implementation in educational environments.

Continued study of the SAC and its development is important to education. The ability of the SAC to positively impact restructuring and school improvement needs to be further evaluated. In the short time SACs have been established and operating, they are making changes in the schools. Optimism is high and members of SACs are moving ahead with revising school improvement plans. Time and additional study will be required to determine what the full impact of the SAC on school improvement can or will be.

APPENDICES

SAC Survey (for the Principal)

Please complete the following survey about the activities of your School Advisory Council (SAC).

Name _____
Position _____
School _____
How long have you held this position? _____

1. How many total members are on your SAC?_____

2. Of the total members, how many are:
   members of the business community_____
   parents _____ students_____
   teachers _____ other_____

3. When did the SAC at your school first meet (MM/YY)? _____

4. Please check the category that best describes the frequency of the meetings of your SAC.
   _____once a week or more _____twice a month
   _____once a month _____once every two months
   _____once a semester _____once a year
   _____never _____other (please specify)

5. Are you meeting during the summer? _____ If yes, how often will the SAC meet during the summer? _____

6. How many members of your SAC have received training on their responsibilities? _____

Please circle the most appropriate answer to the following questions.

7. How would you rate your SAC on its willingness to take action?

   1 2 3 4 5
   not willing very willing

8. How would you rate the SAC on its overall effectiveness?

   1 2 3 4 5
   ineffective very effective

Please return in the enclosed envelope to:

Paige French
Exceptional Education, 4th Floor
1701 Prudential Drive
Jacksonville, FL 32207

SAC Survey (for the Chairperson)

Please complete the following survey about the activities of your School Advisory Council (SAC).

Name _____
Position _____
School _____
How long have you held this position? _____

1. How many total members are on your SAC?_____

2. Of the total members, how many are:
   members of the business community_____
   parents _____ students_____
   teachers _____ other_____

3. When did the SAC at your school first meet (MM/YY)? _____

4. Please check the category that best describes the frequency of the meetings of your SAC.
   _____once a week or more _____twice a month
   _____once a month _____once every two months
   _____once a semester _____once a year
   _____never _____other (please specify)

5. Are you meeting during the summer? _____ If yes, how often will the SAC meet during the summer? _____

6. How many members of your SAC have received training on their responsibilities? _____

Please circle the most appropriate answer to the following questions.

7. How would you rate your SAC on its willingness to take action?

   1 2 3 4 5
   not willing very willing

8. How would you rate the SAC on its overall effectiveness?

   1 2 3 4 5
   ineffective very effective

Please return in the enclosed envelope to:

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Exceptional Education, 4th Floor
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Jacksonville, FL 32207

Appendix B

Guided Interview Questions

1. How did you identify members for your SAC?
2. What do you see as the role of the SAC in your School?
   - 2a. What are their responsibilities?
   - 2b. Are they accountable or should they be?
3. What do you see as your role in the SAC ?
4. You rated your school SAC as very effective and very willing to take action Why?
5. What have been the major activities of the SAC in the past year?
6. What are the strengths of your SAC?
7. What are the weaknesses?
8. What has been the district's role?
   Has the district been of assistance to you?
9. Who on the SAC are the most influential individuals, Why?
10. What role if any did the SAC play in budget for this year?
    Personnel?
11. How was your school improvement plan developed?
12. Do you see the SAC as having power to make changes?
    What kind of power? or what kind of changes?
13. What do you believe will make the SAC better? or more effective?
14. Are the state and district goals for the SAC clear?

Appendix C

Florida State Education Goals

GOAL 1: Readiness to Start School

Communities and schools collaborate to prepare children and families for children's success in school.

GOAL 2: Graduation Rate and Readiness for Postsecondary Education and Employment

Students graduate and are prepared to enter the workforce and postsecondary education.

GOAL 3: Student Performance

Students successfully compete at the highest levels nationally and internationally and are prepared to make well-reasoned, thoughtful, and healthy lifelong decisions.

GOAL 4: Learning Environment

School boards provide a learning environment conducive to teaching and learning.

GOAL 5: School Safety and Environment

Communities provide an environment that is drug-free and protects the student's health, safety, and civil rights.

GOAL 6: Teachers and Staff

The schools, districts, and state ensure professional teachers and staff.

GOAL 7: Adult Literacy

Adult Floridians are literate and have the knowledge and skills needed to compete in a global economy and exercise the rights and responsibilities of citizenship.

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Vita

Born in , Paige French graduated magna cum laude from Armstrong State College in Savannah, Georgia, 1975, with Bachelor of Arts in History. She received a Master of Education degree from the University of North Florida in 1979. Paige taught history, government, and economics to both gifted and regular students in the Duval County Public Schools. Later, as a professional development specialist with the Duval County Schools, she worked with teachers having problems in the classroom and with the program for beginning teachers.

In 1986, Paige became the Assistant Principal for Curriculum at Stanton College Preparatory School. During that time, Stanton became a National Model School and a part of the National Diffusion Network. After 3 years as Assistant Principal, she transferred to the district office and assumed her current position as Supervisor of Instructional Program Support, Exceptional Student Education, Duval County Public Schools.

Paige has participated in a number of special activities related to education. She has served on state committees to review social studies curricula and write the state economics curriculum. She has written curriculum for history, economics, and gifted programs and developed tests for history, geography, and economics for Duval County. In 1985, she received one of 34 national

fellowships for the National Leadership Training Workshop to promote economics education throughout Florida. In 1993, she served as a team leader for the State Strategic Planning Committee for the Education of Exceptional Students. Paige is a member of Phi Kappa Phi Honor Society and Phi Alpha Theta National History Honorary.